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THE

Preacher's Complete Homiletical

COMMENTARY

ON THE

(ON AN ORIGNAL PLAN),

With Critical and Explanatory Notes, Indices, &c., &c.,

BY

VARIOUS AUTHORS.

RICHARD D. DICKINSON, 89, FARRINGDON STREET.
1884.

THE

ON THE BOOK OF

WITH CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES

BY THE

REV. WALTER BAXENDALE.

SECOND EDITION.

RICHARD D. DICKINSON, 89, FARRINGDON STREET.
1884.

TO

MY DEAR WIFE,

WITHOUT WHOSE SYMPATHY AND ASSISTANCE THROUGHOUT A LONG AND SERIOUS INDISPOSITION,

THIS WORK

COULD HARDLY HAVE SEEN COMPLETION.

INDEX OF SUBJECTS ANALYTICALLY ARRANGED.

	PAGE
Accidents, Their Meaning	95
Affection, Expulsive Power of a New ...	61
Affection, The First Trial of	37
,, The Second ,, ...	46
,, The Failure of a Merely Earthly	56
,, The Third and Last Trial of	64
Affection, A Pure and Passionate ...	67
Afflictions, How they should be Borne	50, 80
Afflictions, Meaning of	84
,, Sympathy and Companionship in	75
,, Necessary ...	9, 50
,, Source of ...	50, 80
Aged, Mission of	181
Agreement, An Apparent	43
Almighty, The Wings of	118
Apostacy, Illustration of	57
,, Causes and Consequences of	57
Approval, The Second Gracious ...	113
Astonishment, A City in	77
Awakening, The, in Moab	31
Backslider, Illustration of ...	56, 58
Benevolence, An Example of	108, 110, 127, 137
Benediction, A	38
Bereavement, The First	23
,, The Second Great ...	29
Burden, The Precious	133
Bereavement, Severity of	23
,, Mercy Connected with ...	24
Business, How it should be Attended to	100, 103, 167
Christian, The Steadfast	33, 54, 68, 72, 174
Christ, The Kinsman Redeemer	140, 148, 172, 174
,, The Bridegroom Redeemer	146, 174
,, Cleaving to	47, 60, 68
,, Forsaken	56, 64
Children, What We may Expect of Them, etc.	181
Child, A Good	180
Claims of Destitute, How Attended to	168
Claims of Others Respected ...	157, 167
Chance, Meaning of	95
Changes in Life	80
,, Family	13
Chances, Seeming, Real Providences ...	95
Christwards, Links in the Chain ...	182
Commencement, The Promising ...	43
Confidences, Home	134
Confessions, Mutual	134
Council, Friends in	167
Congratulations	135, 179
Constancy at Home and Abroad ...	142
Crisis, The	52
Courtesy, Enforced	100, 108
Character, Test of	47
,, Earnestness of	72
Choice, Influence of	17
,, Once and for Ever	67
,, Of Youth	69
Contrast, A Startling ...	44, 50
Cornfield, Meal Times in	124
Crisis of Life	52, 62, 96
Death, Certainty and Uncertainty connected with ...	22, 31
,, A Breach in the Family Circle	29, 31
Dead, Kindness to the ...	40, 137
Depression, Spiritual	79
Despondency, ,, ...	79
Disposing, God's	15
Duties, Promptitude in	163
,, Honourably Fulfilled Bring a Blessing	39
Discipline, Necessary	9
Diligence, Illustrated	105
Divine Action towards Men ...	120, 123
Decision, Result of a Wise	33
Earnestness of Character	72
Employers and Employed, Relationship between	100
Employment, An Honest, Bought ...	93
Enquiries, Mutual	154
Evening, Labour until the	139
Exile, The	7
Example, Influence of an Unfavourable	64, 65
Error, Foolish, not Final always ...	17
Family, Remedial Processes in connection with	172
Family History, Important Step in ...	13
Family Circle, The First Breach in the	21
Famine, The	7
Fame, its True and Proper Sphere ...	178
Genealogy, Pride of, etc.	183
Giving, Law of	126, 128
Giving, Liberal, like God's	127
Gleaner, The	97, 136
Gleaner, in the Harvest Field	89, 93, 142
God's Way of Dealing with Men	48, 97, 118, 138
,, Willingness to Receive Men ...	118
God, Surrender of Ourselves unto ...	62
,, Testifying Against Man	81, 84
,, Guidance from	97
,, A Beneficent, Sheltering Power	120, 138
,, Blessing of	139
Good Wishes	179
Gratitude, an Example of	111
Goel, Christ the ...	140, 148, 172, 174
,, Mission of	141, 167, 173
Heart, The Lowly Attitude of a Grateful	111
Help, A Claim for	154
Home, The Departure from	10
Home, Its Responsibilities ...	14, 179
Homeward often means Godward	35, 87
Household, Separation in	29
Home, In a Fortunate Way, at a Fortunate Time	87
Humility, An Example of ...	93, 111, 154
Inconstancy, An Illustration of ...	56
Influence, Secret of	38
Inheritance, Marred	169

	PAGE
Innocence, Obedience in	150
Instability, An Illustration of ...	56
Judgments, Come in a Natural Way ...	9
Kinship, The Ground of Redemption 140, 172,	174
Kinsman Redeemer, The	172
Life, Journey of	76
„ Crisis of	52, 62, 97
„ True Conception of ...	84, 142
„ A False Step in	18
„ Uncertainty of	21
Living, The, Kindness to	137
Love. The Constancy of a Divinely Kindled	60
Love, The Heart Realising a Ministry of	122
„ Zealous and Careful for Others ...	39
Love's Valediction and Benediction ...	39
Love, Can Deal Faithfully	46
„ Test of	47
„ Truthfulness of	46
„ Choice of	61
„ Loyalty of	70
„ Ministry of	122, 126, 173
Labour, Not to be Despised ...	93, 127, 147
„ Constancy in	142
Mara, Meaning of	80, 83
Marriages, Mixed	27
„ In Moab...	27
Marriage, Inspired Idea of	146
„ Darker Possibilities Connected with	26
„ Is Honourable ...	146, 175
Manliness, Its True and Proper Sphere	178
Master. The right Relations between, and Servants	100
Mindedness, Steadfast	72
Mission, A Delicate, Defended ...	152
Moab, The Sojourn in	17
„ Marriages in	26
Moments Sacred	66
„ Critical	62
Mutability of Human Affairs ...	11
Meal, The Common	125
Mind's Transition, Result of ...	32, 56
Ministry of Love, Effective ...	122, 126
Name, Caring for a Good	160
Names Suggestive	15
Nature, Contrasted with Grace	55, 170, 183
Need, Consciousness of	112
Opportunity, Improved	142
Orpah ; or, the Mere Professor ...	58
Parental Responsibility	13
Perseverance, Secret of	72
Pilgrimage, The Homeward	34
Policy, A Short-sighted, and its Merited Oblivion	169
Posterity, Prayers for	177
Progress, Companionship in	75
Prosperity, Prayers for	177
Providences, Descend to our Levels, &c.	18, 96
Providence, A Particular	98
Punishments Designed	9
Prayer Eases the Soul	40
Prejudice, Influence of	169
Professor, The Mere	58
Promises often proceed from Passion, not Principle	44
Property, Respect for Rights of ...	168
Poor, Ministry unto ...	124, 128
Recompense of Righteousness	114, 174
„ Expected, Prayed for, Certain	116
Redemption, Kinship the Ground of 140, 147,	172
Recompense, Humble Toil the First Step towards an After	92
Remembrances, Painful	83
Redeemer, The Bridegroom	174
„ The Kinsman ...	147, 172
Reminder, An Important	147
Rest, in Another	162
„ in Ourselves	162
Rest, Seeking	145
Regard, The Outward Proof of the Divine	123
Reward, The Recompense of...	114, 116
Resolutions, Good but Frail	44
Restleseness under Affliction... ...	11
Reproach, Shielded from	128
Rich and Poor, Relationship between	90, 128
Righteous Man, his Character illustrated 100, 128,	167
Rights of Others Attended to ...	168
Saints, Rules for Final Perseverance of	54
Salutations ? Are Earnest Prayers ...	100
Selfishness, Overcautiousness of ...	170
Separation, The Thought of	42
„ A Final...	53
Shelter, God a	119, 155
Sincerity, A Test of	37
Soul, The Half-awakened	59
Sorrow, Mutual	41
Sorrows, The Beginning of	8
Stranger, Attention to	103
„ Care for	108
„ Provision for	124
Strong, Claims of the Weak upon the ...	90
Suffering, Resignation in	50
Spirit, A Generous, Care and Thoughtfulness of	37, 93, 128
Spiritual Life, Revival of	35
„ Affinities	62
Step, A Decisive	33
Steadfast-mindedness	72
Strong and Weak, Relationship Between	91
Tears, Natural	41
„ A Protestation of Fidelity ...	42
Thrift, An Instance of	142
Tolerance, A Christian Virtue ...	49
Truthfulness of Love	46
Unworthiness, Confessions of ...	111
Valediction, A	38
Virtue, Recognised and Blessed ...	156
Vows, Solemn	66
Wandering, Where it Leads and Ends...	19
Wanderer, The	18
„ The, Home again	87
Wife, Introduction to	105
Winner, The Bread	133
Wife, A Good	28
Wings of the Almighty	120
Widow, Story of	30
Wishes, Good ... 38, 100, 116, 135,	178
World, A Perplexing Medley ...	45
Worldling, Character of (Illustrated) ...	170
Work, Not Degradation ... 93, 127,	147
Youth	181
„ Choice of	69
„ The Season of Warm and Generous Emotions	42

TABLE OF THEMES HOMILETICALLY TREATED CONSECUTIVELY ARRANGED.

CHAPTER I.

THEME—THE WANDERERS.

Verse		Page
1	The Famine and Exile ...	7
1	The Beginning of Sorrows ...	8
1	The Departure from Home ...	10
1	Family Changes	13
2	Man Proposing, God Disposing	15
2	The Sojourn in Moab ...	17
2	The Wanderers	18
3	The First Breach in the Family Circle	21
3	The First Bereavement ...	23
4	Marriages in Moab	26
5	The Second Great Bereavement	29
6	The Awakening in Moab ...	31
7	The Homeward Pilgrimage ...	34
8	The First Trial of Affection ...	37
8-9	A Benediction and a Valediction	38
9	Mutual Sorrow	41
10	The Promising Commencement	43
11-13	The Second Trial of Affection...	46
11-13	Resignation in Suffering ...	50
14	The Crisis and the Contrast Once Again	52
14	The Failure of a Merely Earthly Affection	56
14	Orpah; or, the Mere Professor...	58
14	The Constancy of a Divinely Kindled Love	60
16	The Third and Last Trial of Affection	64
16-17	Sacred Moments and Solemn Vows	66
16-17	The Choice of Youth... ...	69
18	Steadfast-mindedness ...	72
19	Companionship in Progress ...	75
19	A City in Astonishment ...	77
20	Spiritual Despondency and Depression	79
21	Painful Remembrances ...	83
22	The Wanderer Home Again ...	87

CHAPTER II.

THEME—THE GLEANER IN THE HARVEST FIELDS.

1	The Claims of the Weak upon the Strong	90
2	Humble Toil, the First Step towards an After Recompense	92
3	Seeming Chances, Real Providences	95
3	The Gleaner	97
4	The Right Relationship between Masters and Servants ...	100
5-7	Attention to the Stranger at the Gate	103
5-7	Introduction to a Future Wife...	105
8-9	Care for the Stranger at the Gate	108
10	The Lowly Attitude of a Grateful Heart	111
11	The Second Gracious Approval	113
12	The Recompense of Reward ...	116
12	The Wings of the Almighty ...	118
12	The Sheltering Wing ...	119
12	The Habit of Holy Communion	120
13	The Heart Realising a Ministry of Love	122
13	The Outward Proof of the Divine Reward	123
14	Provision for the Stranger at the Gate	124
14	Meal-time in the Corn Field ...	124
14	The Common Meal	125
15-16	Liberal Giving, like God's ...	127
17	Labour until the Evening ...	130
18	The Bread Winner and Her Precious Burden	133
19	Home Confidences, Mutual Confessions, and Enquiries ...	134
19	God's Presence an Incitement to a Question	135
19	Daily Gleaning	136
20	Kindness to the Living and the Dead	137
20-21	Kinship the Ground of Redemption	140
22	Constancy at Home and Abroad	142

CHAPTER III.

THEME—THE CLAIMANT IN THE THRESHING-FLOOR.

Verse		Page
1	One Seeking Rest for Another...	145
2-4	An Important Reminder ...	147
2-4	Work associated with the Position of a Gentleman ...	147
5-6	Obedience in Innocence ...	150
7-14	A Delicate Mission Defended ...	152
9	A Cry for Shelter and a Claim for Help	154
10-11	Virtue Recognised and Blessed...	156
12-13	Care for the Claims of Others ...	157
14	Caring for a Good Name ...	160
18	Rest in Ourselves and Rest in Another...	162
18	Promptitude in Duties, Secular or Sacred	163

CHAPTER IV.

THEME—THE GOEL AT THE GATE.

1-5	Friends in Council	167
1-5	Respect for Property	168
6	A Short-sighted Policy and its Merited Oblivion	169
9	The Kinsman Redeemer ...	172
10	The Bridegroom Redeemer ...	174
11-13	Prayers for Posterity and Prosperity	177
11	Children the Gift of Heaven ...	177
11	Manliness, its Fit and Proper Sphere	178
14-15	Congratulations and Good Wishes	179
14-15	A Good Child	180
15-16	Youth and Age	181
19-22	Links in the Chain Christwards	182
19-22	Heraldry	183

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PREFACE.

The Book of Ruth stands apart from other books of Scripture, and therefore may well deserve and demand a separate and somewhat distinct method of treatment. Neither doctrinal nor polemical, and scarcely to be called historical, it yet has the infinite suggestiveness which must always belong to human life, tried, tempted, and finally triumphant. With such a book it has seemed that the poets have sometimes caught its meaning, teaching, and spirit better than the theologians. So much also has been written upon it, and so well, that while, as in its own harvest field, there is room for the solitary gleaner, as well as the many reapers, it can scarcely be an unprofitable labour to endeavour in some measure "to bind into bundles" the precious grain so abundantly provided. The present attempt has aims in all three of these important directions.

In no sense however must this book be looked upon as a mere book of outlines. "The true value of a sermon" lies, as Mr. Spurgeon well says, "not in its fashion and manner, but in the truth which it contains." The author has aimed, first of all and above everything else, at gathering suggestive materials, and, for this purpose, the opinions of the many are often to be valued above the finished productions of the most highly gifted minds. He holds, too, with the great preacher already quoted, that "to divide a sermon well may be a very useful art, but what if there is nothing to divide? A mere division maker is like an excellent carver with an empty dish before him."

The character of the book lends itself naturally to expository preaching, and to a textual rather than a topical method of treatment. No two passages are exactly alike. The aim has been to bring out the precise meaning, teaching, and drift of each, rather than to use it as a standpoint for discoursing on topics which might better and more fairly be approached

from some other portion of God's Word. At the same time, themes and topics are continually suggested, the author taking it that his work draws to a close when the topic itself has been fairly launched.

In an age when so much has been written about so little, he has no apology to offer for this deference to what some would call "the mere verbiage of the Scriptures." The only apology that could be offered is that the work has not been done more completely and with somewhat more of the thoroughness, scholarship, ability, and enthusiasm, distinguishing the Commentaries on our great master-pieces of human genius. His work has been hindered and postponed by a long and tedious brain affection, but it has been all throughout a labour of love, oppressed only by this feeling that "one can do but little to gild refined gold," and he leaves it with a deepened and ever-deepening sense of the beauty, tenderness, truthfulness, simplicity, and dignity of the Divine Word, as well as of its fitness and its suggestiveness amid the perplexing walks of common and daily life.

To acknowledge obligations in any special instance, where has been so much indebtedness, would be invidious. The author's plan has rendered it necessary that he should avail himself, as far as possible, of the labours of all who have preceded him. Wherever practical the name has been given; and he hopes this plan may not be without its uses in directing attention to works which need only to be known to be appreciated.

That his labours may be useful to his brethren, who amid the pressure of modern ministerial duties find it difficult to appropriate time to either special or extensive acquaintance with the literature of the book of Ruth, is the earnest and sincere prayer of their well-wisher and brother in the ministry of Jesus Christ,

WALTER BAXENDALE.

HOMILETIC COMMENTARY

ON

RUTH.

INTRODUCTION.

(1.) Formed a part of the book of Judges in the ancient Hebrew canon, supplementary to that book, like the last five chapters at present, according to Josephus, Origen, Jerome. The Septuagint, in harmony with Jewish tradition, places it there without a separate title, and Melito of Sardis says the Jews of his day counted them together. Keil questions this (see note, p. 467 Keil's Intro.). Like the book of Judges, a narrative. The contents contrast. At the close of the latter a dark eclipse has fallen upon Israel; the last five chapters a history of sinners and their sins. In the one, Israel seen as a declining nation; the other shews the Gentile hope as enlarging. A connecting link between the book of Judges and that of Samuel; yet a joyous transition from the former (Wordsworth). Carries the history of Israel into the house of David. Links the monarchy with a more simple and primitive form of government. What is of more importance, traces the descent of Israel's greatest king directly from Judah. Like Esther, takes its title from the heroine. Both books link Jew and Gentile histories. Its canonicity has never been questioned among the Jews. Has the superscription of Cæsar, the stamp of the Holy Spirit (Fuller). Not in the Codex Sinaiticus. The Targum on Ruth only dates back as far as the seventh century. The Arabic version is generally considered to have been made from the Peshito Syriac.

(2.) According to modern Jews, Ruth holds a variable place among the Kethubim, or Hagiographa, that is, in the third class of O. T. writings, comprising the Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Esther. This owing to liturgical causes, as it was read from primitive times during the Feast of Weeks, or Pentecost. Raschi and others connect this with the proclamation of the kingdom of God among the nations; and as the custom dates back earlier than the birth of our Lord, the fact is significant. Represents the O.T. aspect towards the Gentiles. The Midrash explains that the law was given on Sinai *to all nations*, only it was not accepted by them. In the letter the book of Ruth forms a suitable introduction to the prophecies, in spirit it stands like the Psalms at the gates of the Gospel.

(3.) Not quoted or referred to in the N.T., unless the genealogy in Matthew is taken from it (comp. ch. iv. 18—22 with Matt. i. 4—6). The language generally pure Hebrew, and that of a very simple type. So-called Chaldaisms ought rather to be called archaisms, and are signs of antiquity and authenticity—vestiges of the ancient colloquial language of Palestine (Wordsworth). One of them found in the book of Job, another in Judges (comp. Ruth i. 4, Judges xxi. 23, Ruth i. 13, Job xxx. 24). They occur always in the dialogue, not in the

narrative portions of the book. The narrative Hebrew is good (Dr. Pusey) Sertain passages have a striking likeness to expression used in the book of Camuel. The quotations in Ruth are only taken from the earlier books of Scripture.

CONTENTS.

Matter, etc.—(4.) Consists of four chapters, eighty-five verses. Too simple to admit of artificial divisions, the existing chapters supply a convenient method of arrangement (Groser). May be divided into two parts: the first chapter shews that many are the troubles of the righteous; the three last, that God delivereth out of them all (Fuller). The four chapters may be called respectively, "The Famine," "The Harvest Field," "The Project," "The Result" (Binney). Like the book of Job, deals mainly with the history of an individual, and those associated with her life. In Job the afflictions prevail throughout the book. Not so here. With good reason the book is not called Naomi, or Boaz, or the Descent of David, but Ruth (Lange). She is the heroine. No prophetess like Deborah; not a queen like Esther; but a simple Moabitish maiden, a gleaner in the harvest fields, strong in her own simple purity. She is no saint, no devotee, no prophetess, but a very woman, and a woman

> "Not too bright and good
> For human nature's daily food."—*Wordsworth (quoted in Cox).*

The book celebrates the piety and loving faithfulness of a proselyte. Its heroism is that of the home and family. Does not preach by means of mighty deeds like those of Gideon and Samson, but by acts of love (Lange). Contrasts as much with the book of Esther (the only other book to which a woman's name is attached) as does the heroine with Deborah. Bertholdt and other neological writers treat both books as fictions or parables.

Character.—(5.) A prose pastoral. Has some of the finest features of a pastoral poem. A romantic, yet historic, Hebrew idyl (Steel and Terry). No doubt a love story (Cox). A beautiful, because natural, representation of human life (Hunter). *Catholic in its spirit.* Sympathetic, not critical. A book of reconcilation for those aliens who accept the true and living God.

"The narrative displays no hatred towards foreigners, gives no prominence to the keen discriminations of the Mosaic law against them, notwithstanding that they form the background of the story: does not blame the really well-disposed Orpah, although she turns back; has not a word of reprehension for the anonymous relative who refuses to marry Ruth; but in contrast to these facts it causes the blessing which lights upon Ruth to become known."—*Lange.*

Deeply *religious, yet domestic.* A brief but exquisite story of hearth and home. Abounds with felicitous pictures of Oriental village life. Simplicity of rural manners beautifully depicted, not by a shadowy fiction, but in the homely records of affection and virtue (Eadie). Not the warrior or the king, but the farmer and householder, find their prototypes here (Lange). The reader finds himself now in the open field, now on the road, and anon among the assembly at the gate (Lange). *In style dramatic.* He makes his rustics talk in rustic fashion (Lange). Yet all this subdued, and with the finest moderation. A unique specimen of the art which conceals art. This prose idyl far exceeds those laboured songs and artificial delineations which grace the poetry of Greece and Rome (Eadie).

"The book of Ruth is like some beautiful landscape of Claude, with its soft mellow hues of quiet eventide, and the peaceful expanse of its calm lake, placed side by side with some stern picture of Salvator Rosa, exhibiting the shock of armies and the storm of war; and receiving

more beauty from the chiaro-oscura of the contrast. Or if we may adopt another comparison, derived from classical literature, the book of Ruth, coming next after the book of Judges, is like a transition from the dark, terrific scenes of a tragedy of Æschylus, to the fresh and beautiful landscapes of some pastoral idyl of Theocritus, transporting us to the rural Thalysia, or harvest-home under the shade of elms and poplars, on the banks of the Halis, or to the flowery meadows and sheep-walks on those of the Arethusa or Anapus."—*Wordsworth.*

Simple, sometimes sorrowful, always touching. We have known strong and rough voices break down with emotion in reading aloud some of the passages (Kitto).* Occasionally becomes poetic in form as well as in substance. (See ch. i. 16, 17; iv. 11, 12, and 14, 15, in Wordsworth.) A most artless and inexpressibly charming picture of nature (Humboldt). The loveliest thing in the shape of an epic or idyl which has come to us (Goethe).

Scope and Object.—(1.) To teach the dignity and even sacredness of much we call secular and commonplace in life.

(2.) To afford a salutary example of virtue in times of trial (Theodoret). The moral encouraging to *unselfish* virtue (Speaker's Com.). It gives us a beautiful picture of *female* virtue, first shining in the midst of poverty, and then crowned with felicity (Lawson).

(3.) To shew how conversant God is as to the private affairs of His people. Lawson says, "We find here that private families are as much the objects of the Divine regard as the houses of princes."

(4.) To prove the watchful care of God over such as fear and trust Him, as well as His merciful providence towards the afflicted, the widow, and the fatherless (Eadie).

(5.) To portray the under-current of piety existing in households, even in times of great national wickedness (Wordsworth).

(6.) To set forth the power of love to overcome all the alienations, hostilities, and prejudices of nature, and of that second nature which we call habit (Cox). The story of a woman's love for a woman (Cox). Teaches that such love is valued before God (Lange).

(7.) To shew how a stranger, one of the hated house of Moab, may be exalted because of her trust in God (Umbreit).

(8.) To teach that when men and nations are falling away from God, missionary work is not at a standstill: a Ruth comes from Moab, and is joined to the church of God (Wordsworth).

(9.) To typify the calling of the Gentiles in Ruth the Moabitess (Fuller). To foretell that the Gentiles should be called in Christ (Topsell).

(10.) To exhibit the piety and faithfulness of David's ancestors (Keil). Written to do honour to David (Dr. Davidson).

(11.) To shew the pedigree of our Saviour, otherwise genealogists had been at a loss for four or five descents in the deducing thereof (Fuller). Supplies connecting links in the chain of evidence that Shiloh came of Judah.

(12.) To contain as it were the inner side, the moral background, of the genealogies which play so significant a part even in the Israelitish antiquity (Auberlen).

(13.) To typify in the marriage of Boaz and Ruth the espousal of the Church to Christ (Bede.) So Chrysos., "Ruth alienigena et Moabitis veniens, sub lege Dei, ea egit quæ figuram gestarent Ecclesiæ venientis ex gentibus." So Jerome, "Christus est Sponsus, cui illa venit ex gentibus sponsa." (Quoted in Wordsworth.) Spiritual and typical (Professor Bush). No mystical or allegorical sense can be assigned to the history (Speaker's Com.).

(14.) To inculcate a man's duty of marrying his kinswoman (Berthold and

* "It is said that Dr. Johnson once read the book of Ruth from MSS. to a company of fashionable people in London. Whereupon their admiration was so excited, that they requested to know where he had obtained so exquisite a story."—*Braden.*

other neological writers). The fact that Ruth's descendants are represented as the children of Boaz rather than of Mahlon, her former husband, against this view.

AUTHORSHIP AND CHRONOLOGY.

Authorship.—(7.) Like many other of the inspired books, the author's name is not inscribed. So far the custom is against giving the name. The Talmud affirms that the book of Judges was written by Samuel, and treats this as an appendix. Samuel is described as an historian (1 Chron. xxix. 29). This opinion held among the rabbis, and adopted by Isidorus and other ancient commentators. Not so Eichhorn, De Wette, Ewald, and many of the German critics. Dr. Davidson agrees with the latter, and thinks it is impossible to discover who was the writer of the book. He that has a piece of gold of right weight, and stamped with the king's image, cares not to know who minted or coined it (Fuller).

Date of Composition.—(8.) Written *after the crowning of Saul* (chap. i. 1), at a period *considerably later than the circumstances it relates* (chap. iv. 7). *After the birth of David*, since he is mentioned twice. From internal evidence *in a time of peace*, and in days singularly free from the bigoted and narrow spirit which generally clings to Jewish history. Could *not* have been composed *after the birth of Solomon*, or his name would have been added to the genealogies. The prejudice against Moabitish women becomes so intense afterwards as to render it extremely improbable such a book would either have been written, or if written accepted in the canon of Hebrew Scriptures (see 1 Kings xi. 1; Ezra x. 10; Neh. xiii. 1). Yet Bertheau, Davidson, and others ascribe its composition to the days of Hezekiah, and even Ezra, because of what are thought to be Chaldaisms in the more colloquial parts. This is extremely improbable, and held upon insufficient data. The book breathes the tone of David's life and times (Cox). Is in keeping with his sending his father and mother for safety into the land of Moab (1 Sam. xxii. 3), and with his whole history. Evidently David was an important personage to the writer; probably the most important in the realm. Keil thinks the book was not written before the culminating point of the reign of this great king. It would be sufficient to say before the anointing by Samuel. Such a book almost necessary to justify the act of the prophet in choosing the son of Jesse, to the exclusion of Saul's children. And what better justification than that of tracing David's descent from Judah? Tradition and internal evidence alike support this view, as well as the testimony of the rabbis and the early fathers. Worthy of notice, that no mention is made of David *as being king* in Ruth.

(9.) Keil puts an interval of 150 to 180 years between the events themselves and the writing of the book; Pusey, 100 years; and the former fancies the contents were not drawn from oral tradition, but that the author may have had the use of written documents. The reference to the custom of drawing off the shoe as belonging to the "former times" (iv. 7, 8) in favour of the longer period.

Date of Events.—(10.) Josephus relates the history of Ruth immediately after that of Samson, and even connects the narrative with the times of Eli. Cox accepts this, and says we may be reasonably sure that the story was enacted while Eli was judge. Bertheau places it in the latter part of the judges, and Keil advocated this view at first, but afterwards argued in favour of an earlier date, probably in the days of Gideon. Bishop Patrick, with Hengstenberg and others, inclines to this view, and points out that the only scarcity noticed in the book of Judges was in the time of Gideon (comp. Ruth i. 1 with Judges vi. 4—6). The generality of the Jews assign it to the period of Ibzan's government, the successor of Jephthah, conceiving Ibzan is another name for Boaz, as both belong to Bethlehem. (Wordsworth). Gantz adopts this, and notices the fact that Ibzan was the only judge born at Bethlehem. Vorstius says in the days of Deborah and Barak. Usher assigns

the narratives to the still earlier days of Ehud, or more probably Shamgar; and Lightfoot, following some eminent Jewish writers in general agreement with this, places it between the third and fourth chapters of Judges. Matthew Henry says it *must* have been towards the beginning of the judges' time; for Boaz, who married Ruth, was born of Rahab, who received the spies in the time of Joshua. Salmon, the father of Boaz, fought under Joshua.

The only landmarks to guide to a decision are the general statement of Ruth i. 1, that it was in the days when the judges ruled; and the genealogies found in Ruth iv. and Matt. i., with such help as may be obtained from internal evidence. The time of the judges generally estimated at about 400 to 450 years. (See Judges xi. 26; Kings vi. 1; Acts xiii. 20.) Another school of critics calculate from 300 to 350 years. Modern criticism is in favour of this latter view. 140 to 160 years left for the events related in the book of Judges (Speaker's Com.). Many of the events narrated possibly synchronous. Keil insists that the Ammonitish and Philistine oppressions occurred not successively, but simultaneously. The condition of Israel under the judges similar to that of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms under the Heptarchy (Speaker's Com.). Possibly Ehud, Jephthah, and even Gideon contemporaries, local magistrates raised to pre-eminence in their own particular districts. In every tribe the judge was the local magistrate. In Deut. xvi. 18 it is said thou shalt make thee judges (*shophetim*) in all thy gates. (See Lange's Introduction to Judges, p. 4, and Speaker's Com., pp. 118—120.)

(11.) Whatever the time between Joshua and David, it is spanned by four generations in the genealogy—Salmon, Boaz, Obed, Jesse, the latter being possibly an old man when David was born (1 Sam. xvii. 12). Usher thinks the ancestors of Israel's future king were blessed with extraordinary longevity. As the genealogy stands, Boaz is the grandfather of Jesse, and the son of Rahab, that is, if the Rachab of Matt. i. is the Rahab of Ruth iv., and of this there is but little doubt. Possibly some names of less famous ancestors are omitted, a common practice among the Hebrews (variously estimated by those who adopt the longer chronology at from four to six, and even eight to ten). Lange, and those who place the events in the days of Samson or Eli, say it is not to be supposed that names have fallen out between Boaz and Obed, or Obed and Jesse. The Scripture language, however, as to the earlier links in the chain, precise and unusually definite. Salmon begat Boaz of Rachab, and Boaz begat Obed of Ruth, the two Gentile mothers being mentioned as well as the fathers. Dr. Davidson goes so far as to say that "the scrupulous fidelity of the Jewish scribe is entirely of modern growth," and De Quincey says there is no correct system of chronology in the Old Testament. Either the genealogy is incomplete, or the chronology of Usher, as derived from the book of Judges, wrong.

(12.) From internal evidence the events must have taken place in a time of spiritual declension and of famine,—a time of friendship with Moab, and possibly of hostility to the Philistines. The way southward to Egypt, or westward to Philistia not chosen, yet these were the usual granaries. Judges iii. presents us with an eighteen years' servitude under Moab, a revolt under Ehud, a conquest of Moab, and a fourscore years' rest, evidently from that direction, accompanied by inroads from the Philistines on the west. (See Judges iii. 14—30, 31.)

GEOGRAPHY.

Scene.—(13.) At first Bethlehem, then Moab, then Bethlehem and the regions around once again. Bethlehem, two short hours' journey south of Jerusalem. The most attractive and significant of all the world's birthplaces (Schubert). Under ordinary circumstances a fruitful land. Remarkably well watered in comparison with other parts of Palestine (Benjamin of Tudela). Even in the present state of

Palestine, deserves its old name. (See note on ch. i. ver 1.) Ritter says, "Notwithstanding poor cultivation, the soil is fruitful in olives, pomegrantes, almonds, figs, and grapes. Hepworth Dixon thus describes its present appearance:—

"A string of gardens, a few steep fields, much crossing of white roads—so many that the point of junction may be called the Place of Paths—a glen which drops by leaps and steps to the great Cedron valley, makes the landscape. Yet the slope which is thus bound in by higher tops and more barren crests, has a winning beauty of its own, a joyous promise of bread and fruit, which puts it first among the chosen places of Judea. The old word Ephrath meant Place of Fruit, the newer word Bethlehem meant House of Bread; one following the other, as barley and maize come after grapes and figs, and the sower of grain succeeds to the breeder of goats and kine. The little bit of plain through which Ruth gleaned after the young men, together with a level of stony ground here and there in the glen toward Mar Saba, are the only corn lands occurring in the hill country of Judea for many a league. . . . The lovely green ridge of Bethlehem is the scene of some of our most tender and gracious poems: the idyls of Rachel, of Ruth, of Saul, of David, of Chimham, of Jeremiah, of the Virgin-mother; the subjects of these poems being the foremost passages in Israel's religious life."—*Dixon's Holy Land.*

Moab, on the other side, and S.E. of the Dead Sea, from Bethlehem. A district about forty miles long by twenty in width. In parts a luxuriant land when cultivated. The uplands are very fertile and productive (Professor Palmer). Now but scantily populated, but presenting evidences of former plenty and fertility. Cox says:—

"The name of Moab stands in the Bible for three districts on the east of the Dead Sea, but we can tell in which of these it was that Elimelech found a home and a grave, for one of these districts is expressly called 'The *Field* of Moab,' which is the technical phrase used throughout this book, while another was called "The *Land* of Moab," and a third "The *Dry*," i.e., the Dry Canton of Moab. This district or canton—the Field of Moab or Moab proper—has the precipices which border the Dead Sea on its western limits, a semicircular sweep of hills on the east, behind which lies the Arabian Desert; on the north it is defended by the tremendous chasm down which the river Arnon foams; while on the south the two ranges between which it lies run together, meet, and shut it in. It was a high tableland, dotted with cities, on which the grass grew sweet and strong; and it has been in all ages, as it is even now, a favourite haunt of pastoral tribes.

CHAPTER I.

THE EXILE AND THE RETURN.

CONTENTS.—*A famine in the land of Israel.—Elimeleeh a wealthy Hebrew, descended of an ancient and honourable house, goes down to the fields of Moab with his family. The removal is followed by his death; the marriage of his sons Mahlon and Chilion to Ruth and Orpah, and their death.—At the end of ten years, Naomi his wife returning, dissuades her two daughters from accompanying her further.—Orpah goes back, but Ruth continues with Naomi.—The two come to Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest, and are received with astonishment.*

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.—*Ver.* 1. **Now**] Heb. ו *vau*, and. The same intro-copula between all the books of the O. T. so far, except in the opening of Deuteronomy, which begins abruptly. Keil (1 Kings i. 1) says the use of this conjunction at the beginning of a writing is a sure sign of its connection with another book. **It came to pass in the days when the judges ruled (judged).** וַיְהִי The imperfect with vau consec. simply attaches itself to a completed action, which has either been mentioned before, or is supposed to be well known (*Ewald*). Assigns a particular period. Shows also a different state of things [monarchy] existed around the writer. Time of the judges generally a troubled time. Spent to a large extent under the usurpation of neighbouring nations. Towards its end Israel had fearfully degenerated (Judges xxi. 25). Does not necessarily imply a judge ruled when Elimelech left the country (*Lawson*). **A famine in the land**] Threatened, Lev. xxvi. 19, 20; Deut. xxviii. 23, 24. Recognised as a Divine instrument of punishment, 2 Sam. xxiv. 13, 14; Ezek. v. 16; Amos iv. 6, 7. That it did not extend to Moab favours this idea. Said by some to have been caused by an incursion of the Midianites (see Judges vi. 3, 4) by the Philistines (*Cox*). Josephus says it was in the days of Eli (see Intro., par. 10—12). Solomon's prayer concerning famine (1 Kings viii. 35—37). Christians' duty during (Acts xi. 28). A more terrible famine (Amos viii. 11),

when men shall seek the word of God, and shall not find it. **And a certain man** (Heb. And a man) **of Bethlehem-Judah**] To distinguish it from another Bethlehem in Zebulon. Means, House of Bread. Ancient name Ephrata (fruitful), though this may have applied to the district as far as Jerusalem. Now called Beit-Lahm, or Beit-el-ham (*Mansford*). Rachel died here. David and Christ born here. Hepworth Dixon advances the theory that both may have been born in the house which is mentioned ch. iii. 3. (See note on that verse; also Dixon's "Holy Land.") References to Bethlehem in the book of Judges mournful ones (xvii. 7, xix. 1, 2). The turn of the narrative here same as in the former (*Speaker's Commentary*). Favours the idea that the writer was the same. **Went to sojourn**] Expresses correctly the meaning of the Heb., which signifies "to tarry as a stranger in a place." Isaac was forbidden this method of relief from famine (Gen. xxvi. 2), when he would have followed the example of Abraham in going down to Egypt (Gen. xii. 10). Israelites generally much attached to their own land. **In the country** (field or fields) **of Moab**] Bertheau maintains, we have in שְׂדֵי only another way of writing שְׂדֵה the singular (ver. 6). Keil, Gesenius, Fürst, look upon it as a form of the plural. The same style of expression used of Moab (Gen. xxxvi. 35; Num. xxi. 20; 1 Chron. i. 46). Moab connected with Israelites in the days of Ehud (Judges iii. 12—20). Continued to be an asylum for them (comp. 1 Sam. xxii. 3, 4; Isa. xvi. 34; Jer. xl. 11, 12). Israelites held places of trust there (1 Chron. iv. 22, 23). David sent his father and mother there. Moabites descendants of Lot (Gen. xix. 37), and worshippers of Chemosh. Their inheritance spared to them by command of God, when Israel entered into the land. This may account for the friendship with Israel, and in favour of the earlier date ascribed by Lightfoot and others to book of Ruth (see Intro., par. 10, 12). Moabites not admitted into the congregation of the Lord until the tenth generation, on account of their disgraceful origin. For description, etc., see Intro., par. 14. **He, and his wife, and his two sons**] Sarah went with Abraham (Gen. xii. 18) into Egypt. Rachel and Leah left their country with Jacob. The family of importance (ch. ii. and iii.), well known in Bethlehem (ch i. 19, and iv. 1). See notes on ver. 2.

CHAPTER I.—VERSE 1.

HOMILIES AND OUTLINES.

Theme.—THE FAMINE AND EXILE.

Now [and] *it came to pass.* Simple phrases bear the marks of a nation's way of thinking. Language has been called fossil thought, poetry. Here the Hebrew faith in an overruling hand. Not by chance, but by the orderly unfolding of events. A common scriptural form of introduction; simple, dignified, yet how much it may express.

I. View it simply as a statement of facts. (*a*) *These things happened.* The phrase introductory to a remarkable life; singled out from many others. Much not considered worthy of record. *Lives* of which the Scripture takes no note, written in the record kept until the last great day. *Events* which have dropped even from the pages of inspired history. Note: When God is silent, it is not wise to speak (*Welsh Proverb*).

But these things come within the scope of revelation—(*a*) for *wise* purposes. God saw fit to transmit the knowledge of them for our edification (2 Tim. iii. 16). Paul bids us look to Christ, yet learn of those who through faith and patience, etc. (Heb. vi. 12). (*β*) For *gracious* purposes. Here are links in the chain, and the end is Christ. The way leads through Moab back again to Bethlehem.

(*b*) *These things happened by the hand and providence of God.* The theocratic aspect is not prominent in the book of Ruth (*Davidson*). But it is there. A special hand of God in all this business, beyond man's purpose and thought (*R. Bernard*). The story of Ruth is an impertinence in Scripture, unless we believe in a special providence. This everywhere taken for granted in the Divine word. God in profane history, much more then in sacred. God in every life. The very absence of what is called the religious element has its significance. The book beautifully enforces what Wordsworth calls "natural piety." But more particularly amid these seemingly commonplace events a Divine purpose and plan. "While the judges were ruling, some one city, and some another, Pro-

vidence takes particular cognizance of Bethlehem, and has an eye to a King, to Messiah Himself" (*M. Henry*).

II. See in it a subtle connection between cause and effects.

In those days of ungodliness this happened. The judges ruled, but every man did right in his own eyes (Judges xxi. 25). Religion corrupted, worship decayed, idolatry common; and here are the results. When sin is ripe, vengeance is ready.

Notice (*a*) *National life affects individual history.* We cannot separate ourselves from our surroundings; are members one of another in many senses. We prosper or we suffer together in times of Divine visitation.

(*b*) *Life as it stands towards God influences life as it stands towards men.* All life an unfolding, a coming to pass. But how? Look for the seeds within, around, in the past; but look above for the hand overruling and *bringing to pass.* God of His most dear justice hath decreed the sum of all discipline (*Cyprian*). Divine law in the natural world immutable, so in the spiritual. The world of morals sways the sceptre over the world of circumstances. Every other view of life *practical* atheism. Do we believe it? rather, do we live as though we believed it? In prosperity we are commonly like hogs feeding on the mast, not minding his hand that shaketh it down; in adversity, like dogs biting the stone, not marking the hand that threw it (*Fuller*).

IMPROVEMENT. By-and-by our life will be summed up in this short sentence, "It came to pass;" the pilgrimage a road with many turnings, but all mapped out. The "to be" will be the "has been." And to what issues? Doubtless a link in some chain or other. Ruth's is joined to Israel's, to David's, to Christ's. A Gentile from the outer darkness brought within the hope of Israel. Gospel mercy foreshadowed so far back in the unfolding of events. In God's time, "it came to pass." Fuller says, "To typify the calling of the Gentiles, as He took of the blood of a Gentile into His body, so He should shed His blood out of His body for the Gentiles, that there might be one Shepherd and one sheepfold"—a quaint conceit, but enshrining precious truth. The ingathering had begun to work itself out in this "*coming to pass.*" The ingathering is going on *now.* How do we stand as towards it? Linked with Israel's hope, or —? What is the life unfolding? A history of one whom God has chosen, and who has chosen God? or the sad story of one who has wandered into strange lands, leaving behind him the home and the sanctuary of his fathers—wandered to die amid his wanderings? or the story of one who did run well for awhile like Orpah? Which is it?

"It is our fault that we look upon God's ways and works by halves and pieces; and so we see often nothing but the black side. . . . We see Him bleeding His people, scattering parliaments, chasing away nobles and prelates, as not willing they should have a finger in laying one stone of His house; yet do we not see that in this dispensation the other half of God's work makes it a fair piece?"—*Rutherford.*

"Life is all one unfolding, as of some quaint manuscript which now we may not be able to decipher, but which by-and-by will prove itself to the righteous a new Scripture full of the benedictions of God."—*B.*

"The curtains of yesterday drop down, the curtains of to-morrow roll up, but yesterday and to-morrow both *are.* Time and space are not God, but creations of God. With God, as it is a universal HERE, so is it an everlasting NOW."—*Carlyle.*

Theme.—THE BEGINNING OF SORROWS.

In the days when the judges ruled [judged], *a famine, etc.*

God takes the events into His own hands. While the judges are judging, God too is holding the balances. The times were evil. Six long servitudes, at least, mark the Divine displeasure at Israel's sin. Sin deprived angels of heaven, Adam of Paradise, Cain of his honour, Reuben of his birthright, thousands of the land of Canaan (*B. Bernard*). Now it deprives Israel of food. A blessing promised on their land, their basket and their store, as long as they walked in His law (Lev.

xxvi. 3—5; Deut. xxviii. 5). Evidently they had departed from that law. And now the presence of the godly in the land cannot avert the evil, as at Sodom. The fact that there are children in the households of Israel does not stay the Divine hand as at Nineveh. No place is exempt, not even Bethlehem. The rich suffer with the poor, for Elimelech belonged to a wealthy and honourable family.

See in this, **I. Designed punishment.** Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it? God has many arrows in His quiver; the land may have rest, but it has not plenty (*M. Henry*). Famine, the peculiar instrument used—a very terrible one. David preferred the pestilence (2 Sam. xxiv. 14). But no choice is given here.

Notice (*a*) *God's judgments come in a very natural way.* The wonted streams dry up possibly from very apparent causes—easy to understand, easy to explain. A drought or an inroad of the enemy may have caused this. But beyond natural causes, another reason—behind Nature, GOD. He turns a fruitful land into barrenness, because of the wickedness of them that dwell therein (Ps. cvii. 34).

(*b*) *There is always something special in them worthy our attention.* Esau, despising his birthright, lost it. Lot, led of his lust into Sodom, had to leave behind all for which he lusted. Judas perished "in the midst" of the field he had purchased with the price of blood. (See Alford on Acts i. 8.) A sad irony often in the history of sinners and their sins. So here, a famine in the land flowing with milk and honey! No bread in Bethlehem, the house of bread! And more, Moab has plenty while Israel is pinched with penury.

(*c*) *There is always a reason which stands out in connection with them.* God had said expressly He would deal with Israel after this fashion. Famine was to be to them one especial mark of His displeasure (Lev. xxvi. 19, 20). Moab may have ease, not so Israel (Jer. xv. 11, xlviii. 11); for Moab is as the unregenerate, his taste for earthly enjoyment and sensual gratification unchanged. The wicked have their portion in this life, but Christ says woe to them (Luke vi. 25; Amos vi. 1). And Paul reasons of such, "Then are ye bastards, and not sons."

See in this, **II. Necessary discipline.** Chastisement meant discipline with Israel. Jehovah explains the weary wilderness privations as intended "to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart." This famine has a like explanation (Judges ii. 20—22), if it resulted either from a Midianitish or Philistine invasion, as is probable. (See Notes and Introduction.) The prodigal child was brought from the keeping of harlots to the keeping of hogs (*Fuller*). And why? The "I will arise" explains and justifies "the hungering in a far country." So always. Christ for mere trial sometimes, for sin at other times, doth cover Himself with a cloud (*Rutherford*). Whatever the reason, the Divine purpose the same—discipline.

(*a*) *Notice the different forms this discipline may take,* as illustrated by the narrative. Want, scarcity of provisions, possibly hunger, and these leading to loss of worldly possessions and the family patrimony, absence from the sanctuary, wanderings in strange lands, years of exile, death to most of them in a foreign land. A similar epitome might be made of many a family history—

> "They grew in beauty side by side,
> They filled one home with glee;
> Their graves are scattered far and wide,
> By mount and stream and sea."—*Mrs. Hemans.*

(*b*) *Notice the severity of this particular form.* Hunger a most trying test. Any kind of deprivation is. The same cause sent Abraham and Jacob into Egypt, Isaac to Gerah. Even Christ must feel its pangs when He is led into the wilderness to be tempted.

IMPROVEMENT. The dispensations of Providence strange—sovereign, even punitive. Can we see this other thing, that they are disciplinary ("Whom the Lord loveth," etc., Heb. xii. 6), and may be beneficial? This last aspect depends

largely upon ourselves. He is dealing with us in one way or other. If not by famine, then by our very abundance; if not by plenty, then perhaps by penury. And to what effect? *Driving us* towards Moab; away from the sanctuary; away from all that links us with the people of God? There is this sad possibility, and the narrative which follows may warn us of this. *Or ripening us* for that land where there is no hunger? tribulation working patience, etc. (Rom. v. 3).

Topsell treats the passage—

I. That the corruption of religion and the neglect of the worship of God is the cause of all His judgments.

II. That the Lord is true in His judgments as in His mercies (Deut. xxviii. 23, 24; Ps. cxlv. 17; 2 Thess. i. 6).

Bernard—

I. That people deprive themselves by their sins, of that which God had given, and they enjoyed, according to His promise.

II. That a fruitful land is made barren for the sins of the inhabitants thereof.

III. That judgment begins at the house of the Lord.

Fuller derives the following uses [lessons]:—

I. Let us practise that precept, "Babes, keep yourselves from idols" (1 John v. 21).

II. Let us be heartily thankful to God for our plenty.

III. Let us pray with David, "Deliver us from blood-guiltiness."

IV. Let us be pitiful and liberal to relieve the distresses of the poor.

"Burckhardt states that in Nejd in Arabia famines like these recur at intervals of from ten to fifteen years."—*Wordsworth.*

"The Athenian women had a custom to make a picture of famine every year, and to drive it out of their city with these words: 'Out famine, in food; out penury, in plenty!' But let us say in word, and second it in deed, 'Out sin, in sanctity; out profaneness, in piety:' and then we shall see that as long as our king reigneth, there shall be no famine in our land. . . . Is this the land whereof it is said, 'Asher his bread shall be fat, and afford dainties for a king' (Gen. xlix. 20), which is called 'a good land of wheat and barley, vineyards and fig trees, oil, olive, and honey' (Deut. viii. 7); which is commended (Ezek. xx. 6) to be 'a land flowing with milk and honey, the glory of all lands'? . . . The people's hard hearts were rebellious to God, and the hard earth proved unprofitable to them; their flinty eyes would afford no tears to bemoan their sins, and the churlish heavens would afford no moisture to wake their earth; man proved unfaithful to God his Maker; the earth proved unfaithful to man her manurer."—*Fuller.*

"Think not that the fertility of a land is able to secure its inhabitants against famine, or that any earthly advantage is sufficient to secure us against any calamity whatsoever. All things are in the hands of God, and His creatures change their qualities or effects at His pleasure."—*Lawson.*

"A clear and striking proof that here is no continuing city or place of abode, and shews the necessity of our seeking a city which hath foundations, the builder and maker of which is God. For if a man be ever so agreeably situated in the midst of plenty, Divine Providence can soon drive him from his rest, and reduce him to the disagreeable necessity of depending upon the bounty of even the wicked themselves, who are, like Moab, for ever shut out from the sanctuary of Jehovah."—*Macgowan.*

"When afflictions fail to have their due effect, the case is desperate."—*Bolingbroke.*

"Suffering seasons have generally been sifting seasons, in which the Christian has lost his chaff, and the hypocrite his courage."—*Secker.*

"There is a deep truth contained in the fabled story of old, where a mother, wishing to render her son invulnerable, plunged him into the Styx, but forgot to dip in his heel, by which she held him. We are baptized in the blood and fire of sorrow, that temptation may make us invulnerable; but let us remember that trials will assail us in our most vulnerable part, be it the head, or heart, or heel."—*Robertson.*

Theme.—THE DEPARTURE FROM HOME.

"Some natural tears they dropped, but wiped them soon;
The world was all before them, where to choose
Their place of rest, and Providence their guide."—*Milton.*

And a certain man of Bethlehem went to sojourn in the country [fields] *of Moab.*

An exile leaving Bethlehem, like Dante leaving his beloved Florence. To this

man also *nunquam revocare.* He dies in exile. God's providences often unexplained in this life—await the clearer light of eternity. Some blame Elimelech's going to Moab. Possibly self-exiled. But no man ought to be condemned without proofs of guilt, and no certain proofs appear in the present case (*Lawson*). Israelites were not prohibited sojourning in a strange land. David dwelt in Gath. Sent his father and mother for protection into Moab. What if a kindred necessity impelled Elimelech?

I. Suggests the mutability of human affairs. (*a*) *We must expect changes in this world,* changes which make life Mara (ver. 20). While Moab is at ease, Israel is to be poured from vessel to vessel. Elimelech an Israelite, and they were much attached to their land—dwelt in the most fertile part of the country, probably a rich man (see notes), and yet in his old age he must become a wanderer. No condition of life, no circumstances, no experience, can exempt us. (*b*) *We cannot always dwell where we wish.* David must sojourn in the tents of Kedar, leave city and palace behind, and flee to the wilderness. El must go down to Moab, Joseph to Egypt. Nay, touches the holiest: Christ Himself a wanderer, "not having where to lay His head."

II. Presents a picture of restlessness under affliction.

Sight, not faith, guides Elimelech. The sublime trust which waits upon God in these hours of peril seemingly absent. The promise to Israel, "Thou shalt eat bread without scarceness" (Deut. viii. 9). To us, "Rest in the Lord; wait patiently for Him; verily thou shalt be fed" (Ps. xxxvii. 3, 7). "In the days of famine thou shalt be satisfied" (ver. 19).

Outward appearances against the promises. Faith weak—he went down to Moab. Some suggest desire after gain led him. Dr. Cumming thinks that he fled from the sight of poverty and want around him. He went out "full." Certainly strong reasons demanded for a change like this. Otherwise God says to such, "Why gaddest thou about so much to change thy ways?" (Jer. ii. 36.)

Restlessness a very common sin. At the first approach of trial men grow impatient; seek a change in outward circumstances, or in doctrine; become offended even with Christ Himself (John vi. 66).

Note.—*One single restraint made Adam a wanderer from God.* (See outlines on ver. 2.)

And III. May illustrate spiritual declension.

Elimelech a wealthier man than many of his neighbours, who bore the brunt of famine rather than expose their children to the seductions of heathen license (*Cox*). If all should do as he did, Canaan would be dispeopled (*M. Henry*). What was the cause in his case? Did he value the sanctuary privileges less, or the good things of this world more than they?

Note a principle in this. Men go down to Moab,

(*a*) *Because the promised land itself seems to yield them scanty supplies.* **The** narrow way not attractive in itself. A gospel that says by the mouth of its Master, "Sell all that thou hast," and by one of its chief apostles, "Silver and gold have I none"—a service which demands honesty, though honesty should prove to be other than the best policy—truthfulness, though truth be an offence—must seem meagre in its rewards, alas to how many! They follow for awhile, charmed by the novelty of Christ's kingdom. Sooner or later He is seen as "one not having where to lay His head," a "root out of a dry ground." Human nature asks large things (2 Kings v. 13). His gospel has chosen the weak things and things which are not (1 Cor. ii. 27, 28). *Scanty supplies a great secret of spiritual declension.*

(*b*) *Because of the rich abundance inviting them there.* Possibly pinched by famine, and in all probability fearing to lose his flocks and herds, the rich grass lands on the other side of the Dead Sea proved irresistible to this man. Lot went down to dwell among the wicked cities of the plain for similar reasons—led of his own spirit and of his own judgment. To both men the journey was as

disastrous as it was tempting. So Judas, Demas. *Abundance is not everything.* The world may seem to have it, does seem to have it even to the righteous (see Psalms xxxvii. 35, lxxiii. 5, 7, 12). A blight always upon it when the righteous seek it. Elimelech goes down to Moab to die there. Lot has to escape from Sodom "as by fire." The young man who came to our Lord went away "sorrowful."

Fuller observes: "It is lawful for men to leave their native soil, and to travel into a foreign country; as—

I. For merchants, provided always that, while they seek to make gainful adventures for their estates, they make not 'shipwreck of a good conscience.'

II. For ambassadors, that are sent to see the practices and negotiations in foreign courts.

III. For private persons that travel with an intent to accomplish themselves with a better sufficiency to serve their king and country."

Bernard observes:

I. No place is exempt from punishment, where sin is suffered to reign.

II. God can remove, by one means or another, men out of their homes and harbour. No man may think himself securely settled.

III. Fear of corporal wants will make men leave their homes, their native soil, their friends and kindred. How much more, then, for the love of eternal life, should we be willing to forsake all!"

Topsell—We note,

I. It is lawful for the godly, in the time of necessity, to crave help or relief of the very enemies of God, so they be not polluted with their superstitions.

II. That the Lord doth ever provide for His faithful servants in all their miseries. Joseph sent beforehand to provide for his brethren (Gen. xlv. 45); Obadiah, who hid fifty of the prophets, and fed them in a cave (1 Kings xviii. 13); Elijah provided for (1 Kings xvii. 4—10; see also 2 Cor. iv. 8, 9).

"When we go from home, it depends entirely on the will of God whether we shall arrive at the place of our destination. When we are in it, it depends no less on the Divine pleasure whether we shall ever again see the place from which we went out. 'A man's heart deviseth his way, but the Lord directeth his steps.' Beware of bringing upon yourselves the punishment that came upon the proud king of Babylon, because he did not glorify that God in whose hand his breath was, and whose were all his ways. Do not say that to-morrow you will go into such a city, and buy, and sell, and get gain. Say rather if the Lord will."—*Lawson.*

"It is an evidence of a discontented, distrustful, unstable spirit, to be weary of the place in which God has set us, and to be for leaving it immediately whenever we meet with any uneasiness or inconvenience in it. It is a folly to think of escaping that cross which, being laid in our way, we ought to take up. It is our wisdom to make the best of that which is, for it is seldom that changing our place is mending it."—*Matt. Henry.*

"Now if any do demand of me my opinion concerning our brethren, which of late left this kingdom to advance a plantation in New England, surely I think as St. Paul said concerning virgins, he had 'received no commandment of the Lord;' so I cannot find any just warrant to encourage men to undertake this removal; but think rather the counsel best that King Joash prescribed to Amaziah, 'Tarry at home.' Yet, as for those that are already gone, far be it from us to conceive them to be such to whom we may not say 'God speed.' I conclude, therefore, of the two Englands, what our Saviour saith of the two wines (Luke v. 39), 'No man having tasted of the old presently desireth the new; for he saith, The old is better.'"—*Fuller.*

"The merchant, having obtained his bank, promiseth rest and security to himself; the husbandman, having gathered his fruits, never doubteth but he shall spend them, and provideth for more; the gentleman, coming to his lands, thinketh his revenues and pleasant life will endure alway, like the apostles when Christ was transfigured in the Mount, presently they would build tabernacles of residence; but as the cloud came betwixt them and heaven, and bereaved them of their purpose, even so suddenly will death come and deprive you of your profits, call the merchant from his bank, the husbandman from his farm, the gentleman from his land, the prince from his kingdom."—*Topsell.*

"Sometimes it dimly dawns upon us, when

we see other men's mischiefs and wrongs, that we are in the same category with them, and that perhaps the storms which have overtaken them will overtake us also. But it is only for a moment; for we are artful to cover the ear, and not listen to the voice that warns us of our danger."—*Beecher.*

"What is this passing scene?
A peevish April day!
A little sun, a little rain,
And then night sweeps along the plain,
And all things fade away.
Man (soon discussed)
Yields up his trust,
And all his hopes and fears lie with him in the dust.
Then since this world is vain,
And volatile and fleet,
Why should I lay up earthly joys,
Where dust corrupts, and moth destroys,
And cares and sorrows eat?
Why fly from ill
With anxious skill,
When soon this hand will freeze, this throbbing heart be still?"

Kirke White.

"There are evils worse than famine. What is the real misfortune of life? sin or want of food? sickness or selfishness? And when I see Isaac (Gen. xxvi.) gaining from his want of food the heart to bear up and bear right onward, I can understand that the land of famine may be the land of promise, and just because it is the land of famine."—*Robertson.*

"People do not leave their country for a mere whim. To forsake the homestead where the boys were born, to bid farewell to familiar well-tried friends, to leave the spot made sacred by religious worship, for a heathen country—it is hard! very hard! Elimelech and Naomi must have felt this. . . . . These involuntary emigrants hoped to return speedily—when times were better. Little did they dream that three out of the four would be lying in their graves before ten years had passed. Their farewell was a final one. Oh! these plans of ours, what folly they appear to us when we look back to see how one touch has ruined them all! Our designs always need 'if the Lord will' written right across the face of them."—*Braden.*

"One month in the school of affliction will teach thee more than the great precepts of Aristotle in seven years; for thou canst never judge rightly of human affairs, unless thou hast first felt the blows and found out the deceits of fortune."—*Fuller.*

"Probably this family held on, trusting that prosperity would again smile; but it came not, and hope faded away. What were they to do? Terrible question! Crops gone, cattle gone; starvation stared them in the face."—*Braden.*

Theme.—FAMILY CHANGES.

"Urged by remembrance sad, and decent pride,
Far from those scenes which knew their better days.'

He, and his wife, and his two sons.

Touches the whole household. The children bear the burden as well as their parents. In times of scarcity, the family a heavy burden. Christ uses this as an extreme case, "Woe to them that are with child and give suck in those days!" (Matt. xxiv. 19.)

We have here, **I. An important step in the family history.** Not lawful unless there had been a public calamity or some great private necessity (*Maimonides*). Nothing but necessity can dispense with a local relinquishing of God's church, not pleasure, nor profit, nor curiosity (*Bishop Hall*). In moments like these, go not before God and Providence, but follow Him (*Rutherford*).

II. A united household in these trying times. Domestic union in the midst of the greatest distresses. Nothing can separate those whom God has joined. Grace finds its most appropriate sphere in the family life. *Husbands and wives who aim at separate interests reproved here.* Naomi willing to go even to a strange land. Saw the necessity. She was one of those wives whose law is their husband's will in all things wherein the laws of God leave them at liberty (*Lawson*). A man and his wife should be like the two wheels of a chariot (*Hindoo Proverb*).

III. A parent's responsibility in these critical changes. The results of Elimelech's conduct were not confined to himself. His children either gained or suffered by it. No man lives to himself, sins to himself.

His care for his wife and children to be commended (1 Tim. v. 8). Did not leave them as the ostrich, to care for themselves (Job xxxix. 16). He acted kindly, did he act wisely? One thing certain, his responsibility was increased by

going down to Moab, where temptation was sure to assail his children. Possible to live like Joseph in Pharaoh's court, but how difficult!

"All worship not at idol feasts,
Whose lot it is to live in idol lands."

David in his exile. Daniel and the three Hebrew children in Babylon. But how few come out untainted! Lot's children seem to have carried the defilement with them when they left Sodom (Gen. xix.).

This man went to sojourn, not to stay. God did not forsake him. The wanderers were fed. Josephus speaks of his "happy prosperity" in the land of Moab. There is *a law of compensation*, however, in connection with all this. He died there. His children married Moabitish women, and then died in exile. His wife returned empty to that place she had left (ver. 21).

"The religious man may be considered in his family as the key-stone to the arch."—*Salter.*

"Is such a man a Christian?" was asked of Whitefield. "How should I know?" was the answer; "I never lived with him."

"The very tigress fostereth her young, and the helpless hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and exerts the full extent of her feeble powers in their defence."—*Macgowan.*

"The godly in old time knew that their wives and children were as themselves; and as they were careful to cherish their own bodies, so they were mindful to nourish their own families."—*Topsell.*

"An honest man careth for his wife and children as well as for himself."—*Bernard.*

"We see the flesh of fishes remaineth fresh, though they always swim in the brackish waters."—*Fuller.*

"If Elimelech had made inquiry, it is probable he would have found plenty in some of the tribes of Israel; and if he had had that zeal for God and His worship, and that affection for his brethren which became an Israelite, he would not have persuaded himself so easily to go and sojourn in Moab."—*M. Henry.*

"Life is the first thing. God wishes no man to starve; and if his circumstances are such that, by remaining in them, he must suffer want and death, his path is clear—he must depart. Bishop Hall quaintly says, 'The Creator and Possessor of the earth hath not confined any man to his necessary destruction.' It may be our duty, in order to save ourselves from pecuniary difficulties, to sever the dearest ties."—*Braden.*

"Now the devil knoweth that this is a blow at the root, and a ready way to prevent the succession of churches; if he can subvert families, other societies and communities will not long flourish and subsist with any power and vigour; for there is the stock from whence they are supplied both for the present and future."—*Manton.*

"Families are societies that must be sanctified to God, as well as churches; and the governors of them have as truly a charge of the souls that are therein, as pastors have of churches. But, alas! how little is this considered or regarded! But while negligent ministers are (deservedly) cast out of their places, the negligent masters of families take themselves to be almost blameless. They offer their children to God in baptism, and there they promise to teach them the doctrine of the gospel, and bring them up in the nurture of the Lord; but they easily promise and easily break it; and educate their children for the world and the flesh, although they have renounced these, and dedicated them to God. This covenant-breaking with God, and betraying the souls of their children to the devil, must lie heavy on them here and hereafter. They beget children and keep families merely for the world and the flesh; but little consider what a charge is committed to them, and what it is to bring up a child for God, and govern a family as a sanctified society."—*Westminster Confession of Faith.*

"Home is the chief school of human virtue. Its responsibilities, joys, sorrows, smiles, tears, hopes, and solicitudes form the chief interest of human life."—*Channing.*

VERSE 2.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.—*Vrr.* 2. **And the name of the man (was) Elimelech.** A descendant of Nahshon mentioned in connection with the erection of the tabernacle (Numb. i. 7). According to Jewish doctors, a noble and potent person. All names ending with "melech" (*king*) borne by distinguished persons (*Lange*). Means to whom God is king (*Keil*). My God is King (*Lange*). My God is my King (*Cox*). God is King (*Wordsworth*). Josephus calls him Abimelech. **Naomi,** more correctly Noomi [LXX. Νωεμιν; Vulg., Noemi; Old Eng. trans. Noemi]. According to Talmudists, niece of Naason, prince of the tribe of Judah, and daughter of his brother Salmon (?). Means my pleasure or delight (*Wright*); pleasant, gracious (*Gesen.*); the lovely gracious one (*Lange*); happiness (*Josephus*). **Mahlon,** more correctly Machlon, the husband of Ruth. Means sickness (*Wright*), sick (*Gesen.*); the weakly (*Keil*); consumption (*M. Henry*). Not so (*Lange*);

rather derived from מָחוֹל (*machol*) "circle dance," Greek *choros*, and so may mean joy. **Chilion,** more correctly Kilion. (*Sept.*, Χελαίων; *Josephus*, Χελλιων); means pining (*Keil*), destruction (*Wright*). Not so; should be referred to כָּלַל, to crown, and so means ornament (*Lange*). **Ephrathites of Bethlehem-Judah.** Some of the older Jewish teachers not inappropriately render "Ephratim" by εὐγενέστατοι [high-born] (*Lange*). Shews these were natives of the city or district around Bethlehem, not mere residents (comp. 1 Sam. xvii. 12; Judges xvii. 7). The place honourably distinguished, and Jesus Himself called an Ephrathite of Judah in Micah v. 2. Euphrates, Ephraim (Gen. xl. 52), words having a similar derivation and meaning. (See also notes on ver. 1.) The Ephraimites called Ephrathites (Judges xii. 5; 1 Sam. i. 1; 1 Kings xi. 26) (*Wright*). **And they came into the country [field] of Moab, and continued there** [literally, were there; Old Eng., abode there]. The Targum adds, and were there as princes. The route supposed to be down the Wady Sudier to Engedi, and then round the S.E. shores of the Dead Sea, as with modern travellers. Moab not so large as Huntingdonshire, and not so far from Bethlehem as is Huntingdon from London (*Cox*).

Theme.—MAN PROPOSING, GOD DISPOSING.

"*And the name of the man* (was) *Elimelech, ... Ephrathites of,*" etc. Names give an air of truth to the narrative (*Lawson*). Express in a very touching manner parental hopes and faith. Of especial significance among the early Hebrews. A really good name of unspeakable service to all who are capable of feeling its aspiration (*Dr. J. Hamilton*). But sometimes given in vain. When contrasting with the character, a continual humiliation.

Suggests, **I. That however others may propose, the final issues of life are with God and with the man himself.**

These names remarkably significant and suggestive. But in what way? Elimelech means "my God is King," and yet some take his life as illustrating the feelings and conduct of the spiritually dead; others, of the backslider driven by momentary trials from God's ordinances down to Moab. *Note* (*a*) *the irony of a good name when men fall short of its promises.* At the present day, men baptized Martin Luther by their Protestant parents are found ministering at the altar of Rome (*Braden*. See extracts). Naomi means pleasure, delight, happiness, and yet she comes at best to be an illustration of sanctified affliction. Possibly the names of the whole family pitched in this exultant key (see notes), and yet their experience is in sad contrast.

(*b*) *Events as they unfold often make vain all human forecastings.* Even parental love not always prophetic. The name given with many fond anticipations, perhaps with much heart searching and prayer. That is all the human can do—the rest is in the hands of God.

The *local designation* of these Hebrews enforces similar lessons. They were Ephrathites of Bethlehem-Judah, a title as honourable as any an Israelite could desire. And yet under stress of circumstances Bethlehem-Judah changes to Moab, Ephrathites (probably meaning "high-born") to exiles.

II. That it is not how men are called, but how they live, and what they are, which is the important thing.

A deadly heresy to rest satisfied with the outward calling of things. The conventional Christian hearing himself termed so continually, begins possibly to lay the flattering unction to his soul that he is such. The sweet delusion grows, eats into the heart of the man. No greater offence than to deny him *that* title. Translate it to mean "the Christ-like," or even the "follower of Christ," and what then? So the conventional church member bears as lofty a name as this, "My God is King." A member of Christ, for the Church is "His body." You may explain that bond to imply "My Saviour my Head" (Eph. iv. 15), and yet how many are satisfied with the mere name! This—

A strong delusion.—The "name to live, and are dead."

A transparent folly.—Others see through it; if not, God does.

A cruel self-deception.—Born of presumption, fostered of hypocrisy.

A crowning impiety.—Disastrous, Laodicean, deadly (Rev. iii. 15—19).

III. That men consecrated by the loftiest associations of the past come to these strange experiences

Elimelech, of an ancient family, born in the most honourable of birth-places, dedicated seemingly from his youth upwards. His name should have taught him faith. Had he been true to that, all would have been well, and possibly he would never have gone down to Moab.

So those born as it were inside the Church, early dedicated to God, registered among His covenant people, and yet to-day they are prodigals in the far country, Cains with the brand upon them, though with something also which speaks of the old family relationship—at best Elimelechs in Moab—God mourning over them, as over Ephraim (Hosea vi. 4) the departed glory of their youth, gone like "the morning cloud and the early dew"—asking, as of Israel, "How shall I put thee among the children, give thee a pleasant land?" (Jer. iii. 19.)

IMPROVEMENT.—*Sainted memories may become sad remembrances;* mementoes of a better past, reminders of a glory which has been, and is departed. Men carry something with them from the past, must carry it. Does it come in to upbraid or to bless? How was it with this name Elimelech in Moab? Might have taught faith even there. But did it?

These patriarchs and early believers types of those still found in our midst. The history of the most insignificant not without meaning. They hold the mirror to all time, though the natural man, beholding his face as in a glass, straightway forgets what manner of man he is. Elimelech going down to Moab! Is the case without a parallel in our experience? "Let him that is without sin cast the first stone."

"Great birth, good means, high name and fame, save not from falling either into sin or outward misery, if a better blessing than all these be not given men from God."—*Bernard.*

"How happy must that man be whose God is King! He may be driven by famine, by persecution or otherwise far from the house of his God, yet he can never be banished to any place but where God is his King."—*Macgowan.*

"In the Hebrew history are discernible three periods distinctly marked, in which names and words bore very different characters, corresponding to the periods in which the nation bore the three different appellations of Hebrews, Israelites, Jews.

"In the first, names meant truths, and words were the symbols of realities. The characteristics of the names given were simplicity and sincerity.

"The second period begins about the time of the departure from Egypt, and it is characterised by unabated simplicity, with the addition of sublimer thought, and feeling more intensely religious. The heart of the nation was big with mighty and new religious truth, and the feelings with which the national heart was swelling found vent in the names which were given abundantly. God, under His name Jah, the noblest assemblage of spiritual truths yet conceived, became the adjunct to names of places and persons. Oshea's name is changed into Je-hoshua.

"In the third period, words had lost their meaning, and shared the hollow, unreal state of all things."—*Robertson (abridged).*

"The meaning in names not always true. Absalom meant 'father's peace,' but the young man broke his father's heart. Solomon called his son Rehoboam, 'an enlarger,' but he reduced the kingdom instead of enlarging it."—*Braden.*

"The believing Church is Christ's Naomi, His sweet and pleasant one, and He is her Elimelech, her God the King. For her He forsook the mansions of plenty and delight—with her He sojourned in a Moabitish world, amongst enemies to God; there He died an accursed death to accomplish her salvation; there He was buried to purify the grave for her use, rose again to trample on all her enemies, and is now gone to Bethlehem, the House of Bread, to prepare a place for His Noami."—*Macgowan.*

Here also we may see that it was a custom of great antiquity in the world, that men and women should have several names whereby they were called, and that for these three reasons:

I. That they might be differenced and distinguished from others.

II. That they might be stirred up to verify the meanings and significations of their names. Wherefore let every Obadiah strive to be a "servant of God," each Nathanael to be "a gift of God," Onesimus to be "profitable," every Roger "quiet and peaceable," Robert "famous for counsel," and William "a help and defence" to many; not like Absalom, who was not a "father of peace," as his name doth import, but a son of sedition; and Diotrephes, not "nursed by God," as his name sounds, but puffed up by the devil, as it is 3 John 9.

III. That they might be incited to imitate the virtues of those worthy persons who formerly have been bearers and owners of their names. Let all Abrahams be faith-

ful, Isaacs quiet, Jacobs prayerful, Josephs chaste; every Lewis pious, Edward confessor of the true faith, William conqueror over his own corruptions. Let them also carefully avoid those sins for which the bearers of the names stand branded to posterity. Let every Jonah beware of frowardness, Thomas of distrustfulness, Martha of worldliness, Mary of wantonness. If there be two of our names, one exceedingly good, the other notoriously evil, let us decline the vices of the one, and practise the virtues of the other. Let every Judas not follow Judas Iscariot, who betrayed our Saviour, but Judas the brother of James, the writer of the General Epistle; each Demetrius not follow him in the Acts, who made silver shrines for Diana, but Demetrius (3 John 12) who had a "good report of all men;" every Ignatius not imitate Ignatius Loyola the lame father of blind obedience, but Ignatius the worthy martyr in the primitive church. And if it should chance, through the indiscretion of parents and godfathers, that a bad name should be imposed on any, Oh let not "folly" be "with" them, because Nabal is their name; but in such a case let them strive to falsify, disprove, and confute their names. Otherwise, if they be good, they must answer them. In the days of Queen Elizabeth, there was a royal ship called "The Revenge," which, having maintained a long fight against a fleet of Spaniards (wherein eight hundred great shot were discharged against her), was at last fain to yield; but no sooner were her men gone out of her, and two hundred fresh Spaniards come into her, but she suddenly sunk them and herself; and so "The Revenge" was revenged. Shall lifeless pieces of wood answer the names which men impose upon them, and shall not reasonable souls do the same? But of all names I pray God that never just occasion be given that we be christened "Ichabod," but that the glory may remain in our Israel so long as the faithful Witness endureth in heaven.

Theme.—THE SOJOURN IN MOAB.

"Nos patriæ fines, et dulcia linguimus arva;
Nos patriam fugimus."—*Virgil.*

And they came into the country of Moab, and continued there.

In weighing human actions, difficult to say what is merely an error of judgment and what an error of heart. The former slides imperceptibly into the latter. We take a false step—pride prevents our retracing it, habit comes in to perpetuate the mistake. Thus folly becomes sin and the cause of sin. Elimelech not to be severely condemned in that, driven by stress of famine, he went down to Moab. Very human this. *What of his continuing there?*

After all, a man must be judged by the standard of his own times. This would in some measure condemn Elimelech. [Jewish expositors do so almost unanimously.] The land given to Israel to inhabit, under special circumstances, with special promises (Deut. xxviii.). Would not the true Israelite have heard the call "to return" sounding in his ears continually? May we not say at least what was not of faith was of sin? Note. *An error generally, though on the side of charity, when we impute the broad catholicity of Christianity to these early Jews.* The traditions of his people, national feeling, education, all that distinguished the true Israelite, against this journey and sojourn. But he broke through all. Does not seem to have had any fear of dwelling among an idolatrous nation.

The danger subtle, unseen, often unrealized, but as often deadly. Malarias are dangerous just because they do not address themselves to any of the senses.

Notice—

I. That the present choice may influence all the after life.

A mistake to put Elimelech outside the pale of ultimate salvation. But short of this, much which is instructive.

(*a*) *A man's error may be foolish without being final.* Seems to be so here. The first of a succession of disasters. Peter's denial a better example. So with the disciple's cowardice, Jonah's fleeing to Tarshish, etc.

(*b*) *But a tendency in one false step to lead to a second, to a continuance in folly.* Peter's first denial led to a second, to a third. Here, journeying to Moab ends in dwelling there. Elimelech went to sojourn for awhile, the same reason led him to continue. The first temptation was *to go*, the second would naturally be *to remain.* Note. *Habit makes the sin of the past the "easily besetting sin."* Lot lingered in Sodom; what wonder he afterwards lingered in Zoar? (Gen. xix. 16, 19—23).

II. That after a false step in life, God's mercies are not wholly denied us. Elimelech was protected in journeying. The Moabites seem to have received him and his family with great kindness (cf. Deut. xxiii. 3, as shewing it might have been otherwise). Good also out of what may have been evil, in the case of Ruth.

(*a*) *Divine providences seem to descend to our human levels.* Follow even into Moab. God does not forsake His children in the hour of their folly. More strange still, the wicked are provided for in the midst of their wickedness (Matt. v. 45). Households which have become careless and godless have some place of refuge opening to them in the hour of need. We fail to embrace the wise guidance offered to-day; His hand is stretched out again on the morrow. Step by step we descend lower and still lower in the way of moral rectitude; His gospel can meet us in the last hour with the offers of salvation and mercy. Note. *This should give no encouragement to men in going towards Moab, but may save us from despair if we are there.* The folly which sins that grace may abound possibly finds a warning in the context.

(*b*) *Men condemn, and so think themselves justified in neglecting; it is not so with God.*

After the Divine lament, "I have nourished up children, and they have rebelled against me—*gone away backwards*," comes the affectionate question of a father waiting to be reconciled, "Why should ye be stricken any more?" (Isa. i. 1—5.) Nay, more; He follows the terrible accusation, "Your hands are full of blood," with the tender appeal, "Come now, let us reason together: though your sins be as scarlet," etc. (Isa. i. 15—18). No condemnation like His upon every soul that sinneth, and *no compassion like His.* It is this that gives point to the Divine declaration, "My ways are not your ways," etc. (See context, Isa. lv. 8.) So with Elimelech in Moab. Doubtless mercy followed while justice condemned. His piety may have been the "smoking flax" and the "bruised reed." Rest assured it was neither "quenched" nor "broken."

IMPROVEMENT.—To us the world offers its Moab continually. Forgetfulness of God is that far-off land (*Augustine*). Note. *The filial spirit has died out in the breast of every prodigal before he leaves his father's house.* Distance from God is not in space, but in affections (*Bede*). Apostacy of the heart always goes before apostacy of the life. Is thy heart right? the important question. If not, the land of promise will sooner or later be the land of penury,—Bethlehem itself a place of weariness and want. To such, life cannot be otherwise than a sad departure from the heritage of God.

Another treatment of the same text.

Theme.—THE WANDERERS.

"I see that all are wanderers, gone astray,
Each in his own delusion: they are lost
In chase of fancied happiness, still woo'd,
And never won."—*Cowper.*

The history of Ruth begins with a story of wanderers from God—a sad but not strange commencement (*Tyng*). A common story (*a*) in God's Word; (*b*) in human experience. We, too, know of a spiritual wandering from God, from His Word, from His Spirit, from His church and sanctuary, from His gospel, from Bethlehem, where Jesus is. A wandering more sad and fatal than this in the text. Those who go out "full," to return like the prodigal in want (Luke xv. 17), in bitterness of spirit (Ruth i. 20), having lost all. Or, sadder still, *who never return.* Jonah a wanderer, Manasseh, Demas. Nay, all men by nature wanderers (Isa. liii. 6). The wicked are emphatically called "wandering stars" (Jude 13).

I. See in what this wandering begins.

(*a*) *Led by distrust rather than by immediate want.* (See previous outlines.)

(*b*) *By sight rather than by faith.* No Divine voice comes to Elimelech, "Get thee out of thy country," as to Abraham (Gen. xii. 1), or as to Joseph, "Arise," etc. (Matt. ii. 20). No pillar of fire and cloud leads, as with Israel departing from Egypt. On the other hand, no angel stops the way, as with Balaam (Numb. xxii. 22—35). No miraculous providence hinders, as with Jonah. Probably his spiritual experience feeble and meagre, his life commonplace and unheroic. The better illustration of multitudes who wander away from sanctuary privileges. The very absence of the miraculous int hese critical moments, these times of choice, when life turns to the right hand or the left, itself suggestive. How many had to walk, even in those days, with nothing supernatural, nothing out of the ordinary, to guide; only the light of conscience. But faith can always speak, and did speak. Contrast Abraham's wandering with Elimelech's—this seeking a country with that mentioned in Heb. xi. Said of God's heroes, they became strangers and pilgrims, but "by faith," and "seeking a *better* country" (Heb. xi. 16). Happy wandering and even sojourning in a strange country, when men can say they are "persuaded," etc. (*ib.* 13). But sad when men leave Bethlehem for Moab, go out but to sojourn for awhile, and *continue there.*

(*c*) *By discontent rather than duty.* A common frame of mind with men, and the secret of much of our unrest. The unstable are always dissatisfied. Clouds without water are driven to and fro with every wind, and ships without ballast liable to the violence of every tempest (*Westminster Conf. of Faith*). Cain's *envy* made him a wanderer. (See also Outline III., ver. 1, div. II.)

II. See where this wandering leads. As in the parable, the son goes to hire himself in the far country. Possibly with Elimelech, also, wandering brought want. If so, another sentence may apply, "He would fain have filled his belly—and no man gave unto him." The peril in Moab as real, though no las apparent, as that in Bethlehem; perhaps more real. The one a famine, the other a scarcity of all those things by which men truly live. Countless avenues besides famine to the human heart (*Lawson*). Which was the best, bread or faith, to have abundance or to have God? (*Robertson.*)

Note. *We need never go far to sojourn in Moab* (*Tyng*).

III. See how this wandering ends.

Notice (*a*) *Journeying to Moab often means continuing in Moab, dying in Moab.* Not said, that the Lord was with him, as with Joseph in Egypt. If so, all would have been well. Not said, how he lived, or even how he died. His life afterwards summed up in one short sentence, "*He continued there.*" Whatever his state of mind and circumstances, they became fixed, permanent.

Notice (*b*) *That for some men there is no returning in life.* HE DIED THERE. How much then may depend upon the moment's choice! this present false step from the path of duty: all time; nay more, *all eternity.* In every sinful life, critical moments when the wandering begins. In that moment the path is turned aside, the bias given, and *for ever it may be.*

IMPROVEMENT.—Are we free agents? and do we choose our own path in life? God chooses the circumstances that surround it. And He has said the way of transgressors is hard. To the sinful He says, "*Behold, I will hedge up thy way with thorns*" (Hos. ii. 6). Are we froward? He will shew Himself froward (Ps. xviii. 26). Do we walk contrary to Him? He will walk contrary to us (Lev. xxvi. 23, 24, 27, 28). Wandering from God means strife with God—a folly, a gigantic mistake (Isa. xlv. 9.)

Bernard observes on these passages—

I. God, intending good to some in His secret counsels, may prosper that which others undertake with no good warrant. Elimelech's misfortunes and sojourn in Moab the means of blessing Ruth. So also Jacob's sons, in selling Joseph into Egypt, were providing a refuge for the family. Christ's cruel death the world's salvation.

II. That if men live where idolaters be, it is good to avoid the occasion of infection as much as may be. Some conjecture that Elimelech went not into the cities of the Moabites, but dwelt in tents. (Translate Fields of Moab. See notes on ver. 1.)

III. That none are so churlish and unkind at one time to some, but God can incline their hearts at another time to others. These Moabites formerly hard-hearted to Israel.

IV. That it is a praiseworthy matter to be harboursome to strangers. The barbarians commended (Acts xxviii. 2, 7, 10), who received the apostle. Abraham, Lot, and Job praised for this. We are exhorted to it (Heb. xiii. 2; Rom. xii. 20).

"What made it wrong for Elimelech to migrate to Moab, wrong according to the Old Testament standard, was that he was abandoning his place among the elect people to sojourn among heathen, whose social life, whose very worship, was unutterably licentious and degrading. . . . True, he is not directly blamed for his error in the book of Ruth, which is written in the most considerate and generous tone throughout; but that the writer of the book thought him to blame, and held the calamities which fell on him and his house to be a judgment on his sin, there is scarcely room to doubt."—*Cox.*

"Oh these wanderings from sanctuary privileges and home delights, how lightly begun, how disastrous in the ending! There are those to-day who are flitting about like the poor dove from Noah's ark, and finding no rest for the sole of the foot; spirits wandering self-tormented in desert places, and among the tombs, like that poor demoniac of old. And Christ's message to such is as then, 'Return unto thine own house, among thy kinsfolk and acquaintances, show forth what things God had done for thee.'"—*B.*

"Like wandering birds driven from their nest; like wandering stars rushing into darkness; like waves of the sea driven of the wind and tossed. Thus we wander in sin, we know not where, we know not to what. Forsaking the fountain of living water, we hew out to ourselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water."—*Tyng.*

"To grasp at happiness is all our view:
Through different tracks her footsteps we pursue;
While each his own fallacious path approves,
As interest leads, or inclination moves;
Yet most through error lose the wished-for way:
Who sets out wrong must wander far astray."

"For everywhere he is a Judas, with whom his worldly interest, his worldly ambition, prevail over his attachment to Christ and to Christ's cause."—*Dr. Hanna.*

"It was said of Athens, that it was 'a good place to pass through, but a dangerous place to linger in.' To the faithful Israelite, Moab could have been no more than this. But it is written of Elimelech, 'He continued there.'

"As you value your souls, beware of the world: it has slain its thousands and ten thousands. What ruined Lot's wife? the world. What ruined Achan? the world. What ruined Haman? the world. What ruined Judas? the world. What ruined Simon Magus? the world. What ruined Demas? the world. And what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"—*Dic. of Illustrations.*

"Why should the professor of Christianity be found eagerly pursuing those trifles which even heathen have been found fleeing from? The world is rather a sharp briar to wound us, than a sweet flower to delight us."—*Secker.*

"Ages have passed away; yet Moab exists in the shape of the world, its pleasures, its follies and vanities; the lust of the eye, the pride of life, the love of the world, that is Moab."—*Dr. Cumming.*

"Let us not therefore abuse strangers, and make a prey of them, making an advantage of their unskilfulness in the language, and being unacquainted with the fashions of the land; like Laban that deceived his nephew Jacob in placing Leah for Rachel, and, to cloak his cheating, pleaded it was the custom of the country."—*Fuller.*

"Romulus is said to have been nursed of a she-wolf; Hieron, king of Syracuse, by bees; Semiramis, of birds; Habides, king of Tartesius, of a hind; Cyrus the Persian, of a bitch; Pelias, of a mare; Paris, of a bear. . . . We know how the Lord commended the strange Samaritan beyond the priest and the Levite, because he succoured the poor wounded Jew which had fallen among thieves."—*Topsell.*

VERSES 3—5.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.—Ver. 3. **And Elimelech . . . died.** The conjunction seems to intimate shortly after his arrival. Certainly before the marriage of his sons. Josephus thinks, however, towards the end of the ten years' sojourn.

Ver. 4. **And they took them wives.** The verb, though not Chaldaic, said to be peculiar to

the later Hebrew, but found Judges xxi. 23 (*Speaker's Com.*). Always used in a bad sense (*Kitto*). **Of the women of Moab.** And they transgressed the decree of the Lord, and married foreign wives, etc. (*Chaldee Paraphrast*). Probably justified by necessity (*Speaker's Com.*). In violation of the Mosaic Law (*Lange*). Marriages with Moabitish women not forbidden like marriages with Canaanites in Deut. vii. 3 (*Keil*). Bertheau, Le Clerc, and others defend the act. Aben Ezra thinks that Orpah and Ruth were proselytes. Why make excuses for them? for Scripture does in no way represent them as holy men (*Serarius, a Roman Catholic expositor*). Traditum ferunt Judæi Ammonitam et Moabitam quidem semper fuisse interdictos, at feminas eorum statim permissas (*Midrash Tillim*). **The name of the one** (*was*) **Orpah.** Previous names genuine Hebrew, these cannot satisfactorily be explained from the Heb. (*Keil*). Means, turning the back? (*Keil*), a hind (*Haller, Simonis*), a mane (*Gesen.*), liberality (*Wright*). **Ruth,** Ancestress of the Singer (*Dante*). A Jewish tradition that Ruth was the daughter of Eglon, king of Moab. Chaldee paraphrast adopts it. A higher honour in that, like Eve, she is to be mother of the chosen seed. God not only wrote her name in the book of life in heaven, but also prefixed her name before a book of life on earth (*Fuller*). Means vision or beauty (*Gesen.*). Either to be considered a contraction for רְאוּת, appearance, beauty; or still better, as a contraction for רֵעוּת, a female friend, or as an abstract friendship (*Wright*). A conjecture that Ruth is an ancient form of the Greek ῥοδον, the Latin *rosa*, redness (*Lange, Cox*).

It is imagined, and not without probability, that Mahlon and Chilion are the same as Joash and Seraph, who married in Moab (1 Chron. iv. 22).—*Adam Clarke.* So *Aben Ezra.*

Ver. 5. **And Mahlon and Chilion died.** Cut short because they married strange women (*Chaldee Paraphrast*). Wright translates, and also the two of them died. The גַּם carries us back to ver. 3. **Was left of** (from). Was bereaved of. "Almonah," which **we** render widow, signifies "*dumb*" (*Macgowan*).

VERSE 3.

Theme.—THE FIRST BREACH IN THE FAMILY CIRCLE.

> "There never breathed a man who when his life
> Was closing, might not of that life relate
> Toils long and hard."—*Wordsworth.*

And Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died.

The story grows intensely sad (*Braden*). Death steps in here as elsewhere. They had escaped one danger only to fall into another sorrow. How true the narrative is to human experiences! The text eloquent in its simplicity, the chapter full of those contrasting lights and shadows which cling to human history.

I. See how much there is uncertain in connection with life. (*a*) *As to its circumstances.* I have seldom seen a tree thrive that hath been transplanted when it was old (*Fuller*). Changing our place is not always mending it (*M. Henry*). Could Elimelech have foreseen this end of all his wanderings, would he have undertaken the journey? But no! he went forward as we do. (*b*) *As to its character.* Different estimates as to this. Cox says, "He lost his life while seeking a livelihood—found a grave where he sought a home—judgment apparently treading on the very heels of offence." But——? Those actions not ungodly which are unsuccessful, nor those pious which are prosperous (*Fuller*). He would have died, whether he sinned or not, in coming to Moab. The lawfulness of an action is not to be gathered from the joyfulness of the event, but from the justness of the cause for which it is undertaken (*Fuller*). Poor man to suffer want in his life, and be maligned after death (*Braden*). Note. *Something of this uncertainty invests every life.* We are mysteries one to another—our actions but imperfectly understood, our characters imperfectly estimated, our lives misread. Christ says, Judge not, etc. (Matt. vii. 1). (*c*) *As to its continuance.* We know not what a day, etc. The only thing certain in that future is death. (*α*) *We cannot escape it.* Elimelech could avoid the arrows of famine in Israel, yet he could not shun the darts of death in Moab. (*β*) *We cannot prevent it.* With this man the journey accomplished, the project seemingly successful; but what of that? He that *lived* in a place of penury *must die* in a land of plenty (*Fuller*). Note. *With*

Elimelech the mystery of sorrow and exile ends in the crowning mystery of death. The first journey to Moab, at his own desire, his own time; the second unexpectedly at God's.

II. See how much there may be uncertain in connection with death. The Bible tells us very little of the closing scene (*Robertson*). One short sentence here concludes the history. (*a*) *We know little of this man's life.* Was he one of those—

> "Whom unmerciful disaster
> Followed fast and followed faster"?

Then a warning to the afflicted, that sorrows bring no exemption from death. Was he one who wandering sinfully, always purposed to return? A lesson to the procrastinator here. Or one having taken the false step, and for whom there is no repentance, no return? Then an example of God's dealings with the reprobate. (*b*) *We know less of his death.* Simply the place, and possibly the time. He died in the place to which he had wandered from Bethlehem, and in all probability just as he conceived his purpose in coming there accomplished. (*c*) *We know nothing of his eternal destiny.* Multitudes live like this, die like this, die and "give no sign." The life such that you can form but an imperfect estimate of the character and the destiny—only hope the larger charitable hope, which rests upon the infinite mercy of God. The death sudden, or from attendant circumstances such as to give no chance of forming a judgment. Note. *To be uncertain on some questions is itself decisive.* Christ says, "He that is not with me is against me" (Matt. xii. 30). The uncertainty here may be merely historic. Instructive even then.

"Once in the flight of ages past
There lived a man, and who was he?
Mortal, howe'er thy lot be cast,
That man resembles thee.

* * * *

He suffered—but his pangs are o'er;
Enjoyed—but his delights are fled;
Had friends—his friends are now no more,
And foes—his foes are dead.

* * * *

He saw whatever thou hast seen;
Encountered all that troubles thee;
He was—whatever thou hast been;
He is—what thou shalt be.

* * * *

The rolling seasons, day and night,
Sun, moon, and stars, the earth and main,
Erewhile his portion, life and light,
To him exist in vain.

* * * *

The annals of the human race,
Their ruins, since the world began,
Of him afford no other trace
Than this—there lived a man."

Montgomery.

IMPROVEMENT.—When life is past, it is all one whether it has lasted two hundred years or fifty (*Dr. Newman*). Death levels all distinctions, thwarts the best laid plans, will come in with us as with Elimelech, to write vanity across our most cunningly laid schemes. What is our life? It is a vapour which appeareth for a little while, and then vanisheth away. Learn (*a*) amid the many trials of life to remember the greatest is yet to come. (*b*) Before the want we dread, death itself may be here. (*c*) Are you obliged to leave your native fields? you may have to leave the world itself (*Lawson*).

"Which, I wonder, is the better lot, to die prosperous and famous, or poor and disappointed? To have, and to be forced to yield; or to sink out of life, having played and lost the game? That must be a strange feeling, when a day of our life comes, and we say, '*To-morrow*, success or failure won't matter much; and the sun will rise, and all the myriads of mankind go to their work or their pleasure as usual; but I shall be out of the turmoil.'"—*Thackeray.*

"When Socrates was urged by his friends to escape from the prison where he was condemned to die, he answered, 'Tell me of a land where men do not die, and I will escape to that.'"—*Tyng.*

"There is a tradition of an Indian chief, who, with his tribe, fled before the prairie fires, till he had crossed a broad river, when he struck his tent-pole into the ground, and cried 'Alabama!' (Here we may rest!) He was no prophet. Hostile tribes overpowered them; and they found only graves where they sought a home. This is, maybe, a parable of the soul: for it earth has no Alabama."—*Dic. of Illustrations.*

"Death is a friend of ours; and he that is not ready to entertain him is not at home."—*Lord Bacon.*

"Death argues not displeasure; because he whom God loved best died first."—*Bishop Hall.*

"It is hard to die when the time is not ripe. When it is, it will be easy. We need not die while we are living."—*Beecher.*

"It is said that Guerricus, hearing the passage read in church, beginning, 'And all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years,' and ending 'the days of Methuselah were nine hundred and sixty and nine years, and he died,' went home and began immediately to prepare for death.

"The ashes of an oak in a chimney are no epitaph of that to tell me how high or how large that was, what flocks it sheltered while it stood, what men it hurt when it fell. The dust of great men's graves is speechless too; it says nothing; it distinguishes nothing."—*Donne.*

"There is a moment when a man's life is re-lived on earth. It is in that hour when the coffin-lid is shut down just before the funeral, when earth has seen the last of him for ever. Then the whole life is, as it were, lived over again in the conversation which turns upon the memory of the departed. . . . For the most part, when all is over, general opinion is not far from the truth. Misrepresentation and envy have no provocation left them. What the departed was is tolerably well known in the circle in which he moved."—*Robertson, "Israelites' Grave in a Foreign Land."*

"'May it please your Majesty, Jenkyn has got his liberty.' Upon which the king asked with eagerness, 'Aye, who gave it to him?' The nobleman replied, 'A greater than your Majesty, the King of kings;' with which the king seemed greatly struck, and remained silent."—*Death of the Rev. W. Jenkyn*, 1685.

"Death does not always give warning beforehand; sometimes he gives the mortal blow suddenly—he comes behind with his dart, and strikes. . . . Eutychus fell down dead; death suddenly arrested David's sons and Job's sons; Augustine died in a compliment; Galba with a sentence; Vespasian with a jest; Zeuxis died laughing at a picture of an old woman which he drew with his own hands; Sophocles was choked with a stone in a grape."—*Brooks.*

"A man may escape the wars by pleading privilege of years, or weakness of body, or the king's protection, or by sending another in his room; but in this war the press is so strict, that it admits no dispensation. Young or old, weak or strong, willing or unwilling, all is one, into the field we must go, and look that last enemy in the face. It is in vain to think of sending another in our room, for no man dieth by proxy; or to think of compounding with death, as those self-deluded fools did (Ps. xxviii. 5) who thought they had been discharged of the debt by seeing the sergeant. No, there is no discharge in that war."—*Flavel.*

"Nihil prodest ora concludere et vitam fugientem retinere."—*Hierom.*

"Where men think to preserve life, there they may lose it as Elimelech: fleeing from the famine in Israel, he died where plenty was in Moab."—*Bernard.*

"No outward plenty can privilege us from death. . . . God can easily frustrate our fairest hopes, and defeat our most probable projects, in making those places most dangerous which we account most safe and secure; causing death to meet us there where we think furthest to fly from it."—*Fuller.*

And she was left, and her two sons.

Another instance of the wonderful subservience of the events of human life to the righteous purposes of God. God deals with Naomi in this way; not in anger, but in love. *Recognize the Divine agency, and see something of the Divine plan.* First famine, then exile, then bereavement. Naomi a Christian, but what is called a backsliding Christian; one under a cloud, one who had proved to some extent untrue, undutiful, unthankful; bitterly chastened, and therefore eventually reinstated in her forfeited privileges (*Dr. Cumming*). Not necessary to take this view of her character in looking for a Divine purpose in this sad event. Whom the Lord *loveth* he *chasteneth* (Heb. xii. 6). Bereavements *natural, inevitable, common, familiar.* None the less they have a meaning, and come to us pregnant with important lessons.

I. See how much there was that must have seemed severe in this bereavement. Naomi left a widow—the husband, friend, counsellor, head of the household, *gone.* The widow's lot always a bitter and lonely one. Especially so here. Naomi a widow in a strange land—far from home and sanctuary. Notice. (*a*) *That sorrow is natural under circumstances like these.* A mistaken notion to think that grief in itself is sinful. It is undue, rebellious sorrow which is to be rebuked, sorrow without faith, grief which sees no future, nothing beyond the past and the present. One pregnant instance at least of a holy sorrow at the grave, "Jesus

wept." (*b*) *That affection for those taken away is still natural.* Unreasonable to think that the family bond is broken at death. They are "loved ones" still, though "loved ones gone before." A danger in this. Affection at these times may become morbid, a matter of mere sentiment. Modern spiritualism in many family circles the perversion of what is in itself true and right; love for the dead, and then a craving for a material manifestation of the loved ones. Note. *It is not the intensity of our affection, but its interference with truth and duty, which makes it sinful.* No man ever loved child or brother or sister too much (*Robertson*). (*c*) *That religion comes in to sanctify alike the sorrow and the affection.* It says of those taken away, "Blessed are the dead," etc. (Rev. xiv. 13), and of the faithful remaining, "We which are alive shall be caught up together with them: so shall we ever," etc. (1 Thess. iv. 17). Perhaps we never love truly until we learn to love with all the deep fulness of a sanctified affection. Especially is this true in circumstances like those in the text. That higher affection sustains and elevates the lower human one, casting round it a glory which mere personal feeling could never give (*Robertson*).

II. See how much there was especially to be regretted in this bereavement. To pass beyond the great loss itself. To the mother a multiplicity of new cares and anxieties involved (*a*) *in the training up of her fatherless offspring.* A mother's task always a difficult one. Much more then a widowed mother's. The strong commanding voice hushed in death. The will which ought to be the supreme authority in the household missing. Possibly this one reason why Paul lays stress upon widows who have children learning "*first to shew piety at home*" (1 Tim. v. 4). This the more necessary since the father's character and influence is absent. (*b*) *In doing this amid the surrounding circumstances.* Journeying to Moab involved much, and perhaps nothing more serious than this. A cheerless prospect to Elimelech in dying, this of leaving his widow and orphans among strangers and heathen, and well for him only if he had strong faith in the God of the fatherless (Ps. xxvii. 10). Even Elimelech must have known His promise: "If they cry at all unto me, I will surely hear their cry" (Exod. xxii. 23). Note. (1) *A caution to those who have kindred responsibilities.* When you choose your place of abode, if you have families, let this be one principal consideration, where you will leave them if God should call you out of the world (*Lawson*). (2) *A warning to Christians who lead their children into the midst of worldly surroundings.* We wonder sometimes why the children of sainted parents fail to grow up in the fear of God. The secret here and in this: led into the world, and left there, as Elimelech's children in Moab.

III. See how much there was merciful, after all, in connection with this bereavement. Her children left to her. The family circle broken into, but not destroyed. Two sons to support her declining years. And by-and-by Orpah and Ruth are introduced into the bereaved household. Note. The wonderful way in which the breaches made by death are repaired by Divine mercy, now and always. The family circle, like the ark of Noah, survives amid the wasting waters of universal change (*Dr. Lee*).

Doubtless the affliction itself had its spiritual use. Preparatory to the "I will arise" (ver. 6). Manasseh's woes drove that erring monarch to God (2 Chron. xxxiii. 12). With the righteous, grief makes sacred. Joy may elevate, ambition glorify, but sorrow alone can consecrate (*H. Gresby*).

Bernard on this verse—

And Elimelech . . . . died.

I. That death is the end of all, and spareth none (Job xxi. 33; Eccles. vii. 2, vi. 6; 1 Cor. xv. 51); for all have sinned (Rom. v.); and death is the reward of sin (Rom. vi.).

II. That a full supply of bodily wants cannot prevent death. This man in Moab, where there was food enough. The rich glutton also (Luke xvi. 22). The rich man with his barns full (Luke xii. 20). Life

depends not upon the outward means, for then the rich and mighty would never die.

III. That where men think to preserve life, there they may lose it. Fleeing from famine in Israel, this man died where plenty was, in Moab. Where we may count ourselves secure, there death may take us away.

Naomi's husband.

I. That it is a grace to be called the husband of some women. Such an one is a crown to her husband (Prov. xii. 4). The foolish woman rottenness to his bones (Prov. xii. 4).

II. That grace in one prevents not death in another. Married persons not appointed the same length of days. We come not together, and we go not together.

III. That it is a great cross for a woman to lose a good husband. In this the wife loses her head, her guide, her stay and comfort.

And she was left, and her two sons.

I. That albeit death is due to all, yet it seizeth not upon all at once.

II. That the Lord in afflicting His children sweeteneth the same with some comforts. In dealing with Naomi, He took away her husband, yet left her two sons; and afterwards, when He took them away, gave her an excellent daughter-in-law. A bitter affliction for Joseph to be sold of his brethren, but it was sweetened with Potiphar's favour.

"Bereavements at home are sorrowful enough, even when the tenderest sympathy beams from the eyes of friends, and all those gentle healing agencies which love has ever at command are striving to bind up the broken heart. But to bury one's precious dead in a foreign country, away from all the blessed associations of home, is a test under which the strongest spirit may well bow down."—*Braden.*

"For by the hearth the children sit
Cold in the atmosphere of death,
And scarce endure to draw the breath,
Or like to noiseless phantoms flit.
But open converse is there none,
So much the vital spirits sink,
To see the vacant chair, and think
How good! how kind! and he is gone."
Tennyson.

"Here we see how mercifully God dealt with Naomi, in that He quenched not all the sparks of her comfort at once; but though He took away the stock, He left her the stems; though He deprived her, as it were, of the use of her own legs, by taking away her husband, yet He left her a staff in each of her hands, her two sons, to support her. Indeed, afterwards He took them away; but first He provided her a gracious daughter-in-law. Whence we learn, God poureth not all His afflictions at once, but ever leaveth a little comfort; otherwise we should not only be pressed down, but crushed to powder under the weight of His heavy hand."—*Fuller.*

"Life passes, riches fly away, popularity is fickle, the senses decay, the world changes, friends die. One alone is constant; One alone is true to us; One alone *can* be true."—*Dr. Newman.*

"God out of these things is bringing forth in us that diviner tenderness which can only characterize the matured and chastened Christian. The time is indeed short, and it is well for us to be made to feel it."—*B.*

"Suffering in this world is both remedial and penal. When it is rightly received, it is remedial. When it is resisted, it becomes penal to him who resists, and admonitory to the spectator. . . . There are two ways of escaping from suffering—the one by rising above the causes of conflict; the other by sinking below them. The one is the religious method; the other is the vulgar, worldly method. The one is called Christian elevation, the other stoicism."—*Beecher.*

"When the bridge is finished, the timbers and scaffolding upon which it has rested are all removed. So God is removing these earthly props of ours, one after another, and for two reasons as regards ourselves. First, that we may learn the great lesson of self-reliance in human life, but chiefly that we may learn to rest above all on Him."—*B.*

VERSE 4.

Theme.—MARRIAGES IN MOAB.

"Honest wedlock
Is like a banqueting-house, built in a garden,
On which the spring flowers take delight
To cast their modest odours."

And they took them wives of the women of Moab.

The father's death did not arouse these Israelites in their wanderings. The sons thinking of marrying when possibly they ought to have been thinking of returning. Note. (*a*) *Every cross bringeth not men home again* (*Bernard*). First the loss of the father, then the marriage of the sons, the wedding feast seemingly following hard upon the funeral. How true to human life! Note (*b*) *Sojourning in Moab meant friendship with the Moabites, marriage with their children.* Little else could be expected. [The Old Testament seems to intimate that the daughters of Moab were fair to look upon.] The two sons in Moab did as Moab did,—married Gentile women, not caring whether they were idolaters or not (*Dr. Cumming*). Is this the explanation? or is it that Elimeleeb and his family were, after all, lights in the midst of a croked and perverse generation?—attracted Ruth and even Orpah for a while. New joys indeed in store for Naomi, yet these mingled with many anxious questionings, which a godly parent's experience alone may interpret.

I. Take the brighter and more charitable view of these marriages. The act simply considered *as following out the usual course of human life* not at all reprehensible. Rather to be viewed favourably—the loss of one comfort supplied by the enjoyment of another. *Judged by its circumstances and surroundings*, much to be said in its defence. The main question of right and wrong lies farther back, as to whether they were justified in coming to Moab. Lawful for Israelites to marry foreign women under certain exceptional circumstances, as, *e.g.*, those taken in war (Deut. xxi. 10, 11). No direct command against Moabitish women, as against the Canaanites (Deut. vii. 3). Better marry than do worse. *Judged by its results*, the answer favourable. Salmon did well in taking Rahab. Mahlon could have found no less a treasure in Ruth. By this act the young men did much to endear themselves to a people who had evidently received them kindly. Orpah and Ruth, wild branches—it was something to graft them upon the stock of the true Israel. (Cf. 1 Cor. vii. 13, 14.)

II. Look at the darker possibilities connected with marriages like these. Bishop Hall strongly condemns such unions (see "Contemplations," vol. i., pp. 210, 211). Note. (*a*) *Does not appear that the godly mother had any hand in the matter.* Seemingly their own act: "They took them wives." The influence which won over Ruth may have belonged to after years, and to Naomi's character and life (ii. 12). The sons themselves possibly having lost all which ought to distinguish the true Israelite. Such marriages fraught with great danger, even if overruled for good. The decisive step taken, and the future has to decide whether for good or evil. Note. (*b*) In the most favourable view, *these young men to blame, unless they had credible evidence their future wives were cordially disposed towards the worship of God.* The wife's influence often more subtle, and even more powerful and lasting in religious matters, than the husband's. The strength of Samson, the wisdom of Solomon, not sufficient to withstand it when used for evil. Note. (*c*) *Impossible to say what was the effect upon the young men themselves.* Judging from the influence of Eve over Adam, etc., we fear it was evil (*Dr. Cumming*). Would naturally tend to lengthen the sojourn in Moab. Mahlon and Chilion exceptionally fortunate in their wives (*Cox*). Strange if they should have deteriorated, while Orpah and Ruth were benefited; yet not impossible—not unlikely. Characters assimilate, mutually act and react upon each other—give and take, especially when the bond is as close as that of marriage.

III. Improvement. To the Christian the command is, "Be not unequally yoked," etc. (2 Cor. vi. 14). His privilege "to marry in the Lord." This safe—without offence—within the sphere of the promises. (See next outline.)

Braden on this:—

Mahlon married Ruth, Chilion Orpah. Little is known of either, perhaps they were sisters—the parents' names not mentioned. Both natives of Moab, and heathen—appear to have remained so while in their own land. (See i. 15.)

The question asked, *Were these two young men right in marrying heathen women?* Some writers justify, others condemn. A plausible case can be made out in their favour: great distance from Bethlehem, absence of Jewish maidens, uncertainty of their return, naturally diminished interest in their native land, arising from long residence in Moab, the fact that there was no distinct commandment against marrying a Moabitess, though there was against marrying a Canaanite—all good reasons for pleading on their behalf. More, Boaz married Ruth afterwards, and God made her ancestress of Christ. Yet were not absolutely free from blame. God overruled for good, still they erred. This nation under a curse, excluded from the Jews (Deut. xxiii. 3). Ezra rent his garment, etc., under similar circumstances (Ezra ix.). No doubt, to marry a heathen a sin in the eyes of the Jew.

A practical question started: *Should a professing Christian marry one who makes no such profession?* "Whatsoever is not of faith is of sin." If you are not firmly convinced the step is right, then for you it is sin. Does the N. T. lay down any law? *No direct utterance* on the subject to be discovered. Paul's warning (2 Cor. vi. 14), "Be ye not unequally yoked with unbelievers," etc., often quoted against such mixed marriages, but does not specifically refer to them. The apostle arguing as to the whole relationship of life, urging that the Christian Church should be separated from heathen associations. The greater, however, included in the less. The law applicable to the entire life peculiarly touches marriage.

It may be answered, "Times have changed, the broad line of demarcation between believer and unbeliever no longer exists. Heathen are not found among us; non-professors moral and reputable in life, and can hardly be designated "unbelievers." True, no doubt. The lines between the Church and the world faded, a mutual movement towards each other. Many see no wrong in marrying one who appears to be everything but a professor of religion. A mistake to burden consciences by asserting that any course of conduct is sinful if the vexed matter is fairly open to doubt. Tends to produce a reaction, in which sacred principles are themselves thrown aside.

This, however, may be maintained, *that mixed marriages are eminently inexpedient and very dangerous.* A want of sympathetic religious convictions between husband and wife injuriously affects their sacred relationship. True marriage rests on common admiration and sympathy—a union of hearts. If religion, which concerns the deepest emotions and noblest thoughts, is excluded, the union disastrously incomplete, the real foundation insecure. Love which rises from other things meagre, partial, unsatisfactory—the richest cords of the soul untouched. That which one esteems as *the best thing in life*, the other may not possess—a perpetual craving for sympathy where it cannot be given. The hindrances and sorrows springing from this spiritual isolation incalculable. *Man and wife do not understand each other.* Look at numberless experiences from opposite standpoints—motives imputed, sneers at saintliness uttered perhaps on one side, and denunciations at godlessness on the other. Multitudes of *family quarrels arise from want of spiritual union*, and the highest aspirations of the godly soul perpetually thwarted. Then *the education of the children perplexing;* the example of the one nullified by the conduct of the other. To marry an unbelieving husband or wife may involve the future destiny of the offspring. If the children grow up in the fear of God, it will be in spite of the bad example of one parent.

It may be said *that many wed hoping to produce a change.* They may be instrumental in the conversion of the beloved one—a beautiful but most delusive hope. Can instances be quoted? Their scarcity contrasts most painfully with the multitude of failures. *Religious influence generally less after marriage than before.* The charm strangely disappears, the same words irritate. More difficult to speak upon these themes, lest there should be some taunt about inconsistency. Easier to address strangers about Christ, than our own households. The home friends know our failings—do not see our struggles against them. Decision for God the great pre-requisite for a happy and useful marriage, far better than beauty—intellect—wealth.

(Condensed by permission from "The Beautiful Gleaner.")

"Here we see the fashion of the world. Mankind had long ago decayed, if those breaches which are daily made by death were not daily made up by marriage."—*Fuller.*

"And thus the world moves on—deaths and marriages, marriages and deaths. The household which to-day mourns as though all joy had taken flight for ever, to-morrow resounds with the laughter of many voices at a new-born happiness. The faces all tear-stained yesterday are bright with smiles to-day. The bell which slowly tolled the funeral knell an hour ago, now rings out the joyous wedding-chime. So it must be, so it ought to be. Probably life would lose half its beauty but for this alternation of shadow and sunshine; at least, this we know, that human hearts need both the darkness and the light, or they will not grow to that perfection of truth and purity which God has designed they shall attain. Elimelech died, the sons married. It is a simple statement, yet a whole world of change is involved in it for that small household."—*Braden.*

"Hail, wedded love, mysterious law, true source
Of human offspring, sole propriety
In paradise of all things common else,
By thee adulterous lust was drawn from men
Among the bestial herds to range; by thee,
Founded on reason, loyal, just, and pure,
Relations dear and all the charities
Of father, son, and brother, first were known." *Milton.*

"Wherever found, women are the same kind, civil, obliging, human tender beings, inclined to be gay and cheerful, humorous and modest."—*Ledyard.*

"True marriage rests on common admiration and sympathy: it is the union of hearts in the bonds of holiest love. If, however, religion, which concerns the deepest emotions and noblest thoughts, is excluded, the union of the two natures is disastrously incomplete, the real foundation of married life becomes fearfully insecure."—*Braden.*

"Marriage has less of beauty, but more of safety, than the single life. It hath not more ease, but less danger; it is more merry and more sad; it is fuller of sorrows and fuller of joys; it lies under more burdens, but it is supported by all the strength of love and charity, and those burdens are delightful. . . . It is that state of good to which God hath designed the present constitution of the world."—*Jeremy Taylor.*

"The woman's cause is man's. They rise or sink
Together. Dwarfed or godlike, bond or free;
If she be small, slight-natured, miserable,
How shall men grow? . . . Let her be
All that not harms distinctive womanhood;
For woman is not undeveloped man,
But diverse. Could we make her as the man,
Sweet love were slain, whose dearest bond is this,
Not like to like, but like in difference;
Yet in the long years must they liker grow;
The man be more of woman, she of man,
* * * * *
Till at the last she set herself to man
Like perfect music unto noble words."
Tennyson.

"——An unlessoned girl, unschooled, unpractised;
Happy in this, she is not yet so old
But she may learn: and happier than this,
She is not bred so dull but she can learn;
Happiest of all, is, that her gentle spirit
Commits itself to yours, to be directed
As from her lord, her governor, her king."
Shakespeare.

"When a woman marries a man that is ungodly, wrong as it is, we may indulge a reasonable hope that he through her influence will become a Christian. But it rarely happens when a man marries a woman that is not a Christian, that she becomes a Christian; rather he sinks down to her moral level."—*Dr. Cumming.*

"A good wife is heaven's last, best gift to a man; his angel of mercy, minister of graces innumerable; his gem of many virtues, his casket of jewels."—*Jeremy Taylor.*

"No doubt it is a truism to say that in any case marriage is a solemn thing. We smile and jest over it; the prospect of a wedding always awakens good-humoured remark; festivities appropriately accompany the celebration; yet we cannot lose sight of the grave importance of the event itself. Two human beings of differing temperament and education stand before God and clasp hands, covenanting 'to be faithful even unto death.'

Henceforth the making or the marring of each other's happiness rests with that husband and wife. Henceforth they are bound by a tie strong as the law itself, and no discovery of incompatibility of character, no change of temporal circumstances, no mere inconveniences of position, only distinct criminal acts, can 'put asunder' 'what God hath joined together.' Well, therefore, does the Service declare that it should 'not be taken in hand unadvisedly, lightly, or wantonly, but reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of God.'"—*Braden.*

"Marriage is the best state for man in general; and every man is a worse man in proportion as he is unfit for the married state."—*Dr. Johnson.*

"He that goes far to marry, goes to be deceived or to deceive. The day you marry you kill or cure yourself."—*Spanish Proverbs.*

VERSE 5.

Theme.—THE SECOND GREAT BEREAVEMENT.

"Is God less God, that thou art left undone?
Rise, worship, bless Him, in this sackcloth spun,
As in that purple!"—*Mrs. Browning*

Then died these two also.

Thus far the book of Ruth resembles that symphony of Beethoven, in which the song of birds, the cheerful hum of a holiday crowd, . . . are hushed by the crash of a sudden and threatening storm (*Cox*). Scarcely so: all along there has been the undertone of sorrow, affliction following affliction. But we can imagine years of happy prosperity (possibly ten) in Moab, since the last great calamity (ver. 3). Now a further trial—to Naomi the climax of all which has gone before, a more terrible famine than that in the land of Israel.

I. We have Death here once again in the family circle. Three sepulchres now attest his melancholy ravages (*Eadie*). This time the sons taken in the flush of manhood; not as the father, who might well have anticipated his end. Note. (*a*) *Even the young man's life a vapour.* Death no respecter of youth, or strength, or beauty. The blossom as subject to be nipped as the flower, the spark to be extinguished as the flame. Was it the "joy" and the "ornament" (see note on ver. 2) of this household God took, or the "weakly" and the "pining" ones? Was the death sudden, or ushered in by signs of failing strength, as the latter interpretation of the names would seem to intimate? The Scripture language severe in its brevity, but touching in its simplicity, "Then died these two *also*" (see notes)—died in banishment, from their fatherland, perhaps from their father's God. (*b*) *The young man's plans vanity.* Escaped famine, but death overtook them. Founded their houses in Moab, Moab became their grave (*Lange*). Probably determined not to return home until the famine was over; when it was, they themselves were no more (*Lange*).

II. We have separation once more in the household life. Husband from wife, children from a fond parent. With Naomi, first it had been separation from kinsfolk and acquaintances, then from husband, now from her sons. Thus the Divine hand is removing one after another the ties which bind her affections earthward. Note. *A warning against seeking unmitigated satisfaction in family joys.* We should live together as those who may be called upon to separate at any moment. Rather as those who look for a union beyond the separation (1 Thess. iv. 14).

"The love that rose on stronger wings,
Unpalsied when he met with Death,
Is comrade of the lesser faith,
That sees the course of human things,
* * * * *
That all, as in some piece of art,
Is toil co-operant to an end."—*Tennyson.*

III. We have still further separation in a foreign land. New afflictions

added to Naomi's former griefs—loss upon loss, trial following trial. The grief of the two younger widows not mentioned—speechless before a more majestic sorrow than its own. "And *the woman* was left of her two sons and her husband." The desolation of bereavement never more vividly pictured than by these touching phrases (*Braden*). To heighten the picture, what little wealth had remained would seem to have vanished. Poverty comes in upon them "like an armed man." Note. (*a*) *The case by no means singular, even though the afflictions are complicated.* Bereavement! in what household is the shadow unknown?

> "Too common! never morning wore
> To evening, but some heart did break.

The widow's story too familiar! Note. (*b*) *These providences mysterious—inscrutable.* Only on all theories of human life, the atheist's among the rest, they face us, and we must bow to them. Explain it or not, here is the fact. And happy those alone who can say, as Naomi appears to have done, "Although I have lost the gift, I have not lost the GIVER (*Dr. Cumming*). Faith only, though it be "but as a grain of mustard seed," can give consolation in such hours. Note. (*c*) *Some comfort remaining even to the most forlorn and desolate.* The sons' wives left in the household—human love side by side with Divine care.

> "Oh weep no more! there yet is balm
> In Gilead: love doth ever shed
> Rich healing where it nestles, spread
> O'er desert pillows some green palm.
> God's ichor fills the hearts that bleed,
> The best fruit loads the broken bough,
> And in the wounds our sorrows plough,
> Immortal love sows sovereign seed."—*Gerald Massey.*

Improvement. (*a*) When heavy calamities befall, beware of speaking or even thinking unadvisedly of them. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth," etc. (Gen. xviii. 25). Our best thoughts sometimes presumptuous on these matters. (*b*) The love or hatred of God not to be estimated by what we see of His doings. (*c*) Let none because of youth put far off the day of death (*Bernard*). The question of early death is one about which no like mystery hangs (*Braden*). Some He takes away from the evil of the world; others for reasons beyond our present knowledge and judgment. (*d*) *Those least expected may be most likely to go soonest.* Remember **now**, etc. (Eccl. xii. 1).

M. Henry on this:—

I. That wherever we go we cannot outrun death, whose fatal arrows fly in all places.

II. That we cannot expect to prosper when we go out of the way of our duty. He that will save his life by any indirect course shall lose it.

III. That death, when it comes into a family often, makes breach upon breach. One is taken away to prepare another to follow; that affliction not duly improved, God sends another of the same kind.

Bernard:—

That the Lord gave them time to marry and to enjoy their marriage for some space, though they made no better use of their father's death. Thus good and patient is God unto men for their bettering.

II. That when God hath proved men in patience, and they will not make right use thereof, then will He take them away.

III. That God can, and sometimes will, cut off young men in the flower of their youth. So Nadab, Abihu, Hophni and Phinehas, Amnon, etc. Some for their own sins, as Absalom; others for their father's, as David's child (2 Sam. xii. 14) and the sons of Saul.

' The end of one sorrow is the beginning of another, like the drops of rain distilling from the top of a house, when one is gone another followeth; like a ship upon the sea,

being on the top of one wave presently is cast down to the foot of another; like seed, which being spread by the sower is haunted by the fowls, being green and past their reach is endangered by frost and snow, being past the winter's hurt, by beasts in summer, being ripe is cut with the sickle, threshed with the flail, purged in the floor, ground in the mill, baked in the oven."—*Topsell.*

"The good husbandman may pluck his roses and gather in his lilies at midsummer, and for aught I dare say in the beginning of the first summer months; and he may transplant young trees out of the lower ground to the higher. What is that to you or me? The goods are his own."—*Rutherford.*

"With many it is ebb water before the tide be at the full. The lamps of their lives are wasted almost as soon as they are lighted. The sand of their hour-glass is run out when they think it is but newly turned."—*Seeker.*

"Oh! these earthly separations from those we love, how terribly do they scald and wear the heart! day by day to see those things laid out, as it were, in such stony, death-like forms, which used to lie about here and there, in that sweet abandonment of daily life."—*Power.*

"'Death strikes with equal foot the rustic cottage and the palaces of kings.' After ten years, in which the members of this notable family seem to have opposed a constant face to the austere and threatening brow of misfortune, and to have grown the dearer to each other for the sorrows and calamities they shared together, Mahlon and Chilion, still young men, followed their father to the grave, and Naomi was left a childless widow. Songs of mirth were exchanged for songs of mourning. The three men of the household had gone to their long home, and the three bereaved women were left to weep together, and to comfort each other as best they might."—*Cox.*

"Even young men in the prime of their age are subject to death. The sons of Jacob, when they came to the table of Joseph, sat down, the eldest according to his age, and the youngest according to his youth: but Death observes not this method; he takes not men in seniority, but sometimes sends them first to the burial that came last from the birth, and those that came last from the womb, first to the winding-sheet."—*Fuller.*

"He the young, the strong, who cherished
Noble longings for the strife,
By the wayside fell and perished,
Weary with the march of life."
Longfellow.

"Hush! listen! let the heart in silence learn
How that of all things fair Time hath no certain hold:
The fairest flower, the greenest leaf, may fade.
Death is a ravening wolf, sparing no earthly fold." *B.*

"Death is the solemn thought of the world. Let it be ever so vulgarized or common; still beneath the tent of the eastern emir, or in the crowded cemeteries of the capital, death is an awful arresting thing. While civilization has robbed other horrors of their wonder, death is still the insoluble event. But here we have something more than death; we have separation. . . . Death becomes awfully credible when those we are accustomed to live with die. We feel then as those tell us they have felt who have experienced an earthquake. The earth, the most stable of things, becomes to them unstable, and to us the solid life becomes hollow, and 'I may be the next' is the first thought."—*Robertson.*

"God keeps a niche
In heaven to hold our idols: and, albeit
He brake them to our faces and denied
That our close kisses should impair their white,
I know we shall behold them raised complete,
The dust swept from their beauty—glorified,
New Memnons singing in the great God-light." *Mrs. Browning.*

"When you and I die, Providence will not be buried in our grave; the 'Redeemer liveth.' We entrust to Him our eternal life, shall we not entrust to Him our dearest earthly relatives? He will be a husband to my beloved wife, and a father to my children, when I can no longer look after them; His gracious presence will cheer them in solitude, shield them in danger, guide their inexperience through untrodden paths in the darkest night."—*Dr. Waugh.*

"Before we had the particular losses of Naomi, now we have them all reckoned up in the total sum. "A threefold cable," saith Solomon, "is not easily broken," and yet we see Naomi's threefold cable of comfort, twisted of her husband and her two sons, broken by death. Of the two sexes, the woman is the weaker; of women, old women are most feeble; of old women, widows most woful; of widows, those that are poor, their plight most pitiful; of poor widows, those that want children their case most doleful; of widows that want children, those that once had them and after lost them, their estate most desolate; of widows that have had children, those that are strangers in a foreign country, their condition most comfortless. Yet all these meet together in Naomi, as in the centre of sorrow, to make the measure of her misery 'pressed down, shaken together, running over.' I conclude, therefore, many men have had affliction—none like Job; many women have had tribulation—none like Naomi."—*Fuller.*

"High up the mountain slopes of Chamouni there is a plain covered with verdure and flowers. Thither the shepherds of the Alps drive their flocks. At one point of the ascent the rocks rise almost perpendicular.

When the flock arrives at this point, none is bold enough to venture; but the shepherds gather the lambs in their arms, and toss them upon the plain; the whole flock clambers after them, and soon is feeding upon the rich herbage, or ruminating beneath the 'rose-trees of the Alps.' Bereaved parents, the lamb of your love has been carried up, and beckons you to follow where are flowers sweeter than those of the Alps, and air and sunshine purer and brighter than is found up in Chamouni."—*Dic. of Illustrations.*

VERSES 6, 7.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.—*Vv.* 6, 7. **Then** [and] **she arose.** She arose in order to return. Et surrexit ut in patriam pergeret (*Vulgate*). **With her daughters-in-law.** Both the young women set out with the intention of going to Bethlehem (*Bertheau and others*). **That she might return.** לָשׁוּב (to return) applies strictly and grammatically to Naomi only. **For she had heard.** By the mouth of an angel (*Targum*). The cause of her rising to return was not the death of her sons, but the message (*Speaker's Com.*). **That the Lord had visited,** etc. Because of the righteousness of Ibzan the judge, and because of the simplicity of the pious Boaz (*Targum*). פָּקַד occurs repeatedly for such a return of Divine remembrance (*Lange*). The language (comp. Luke i. 72, vii. 16), especially in the LXX., can hardly fail to draw the mind onward to that used in connection with the coming of Christ (*Wordsworth*). **In giving them bread.** Ps. cvii. 35—37; Luke i. 68. From the turn of the language it may properly be inferred that the famine was not the result of war, but of drought (*Lange*). **And they went on the way.** And *they* already went, etc. (*Lange*). From this verse it appears plain that all started out for the land of Judah (*Bertheau*)! Until now Naomi had looked on her daughters-in-law as only bearing her company for a while (*Dr. Cassel, in Lange*). The journey to the borders of their own land would probably be an act of oriental courtesy, whether they intended to proceed further or not (*Speaker's Com.*). The sense here demands that this should be read with the following verse: *i.e.*, "On their way Naomi said," etc.

VERSE 6.

Theme.—THE AWAKENING IN MOAB.

"Ah, graceless heart! would that it could regain
From the dim storehouse of sensations past
The impress full of tender awe, that night
Which fell on us! It was as if the Christ
Had been drawn down from heaven to track us home."
Jean Ingelow.

Then she arose with her daughters-in-law.

No rest, no comfort, no profit in Moab. Perhaps Naomi had said, "I shall die in my nest" (Job xxix. 18). Not so, the nest is broken up. Now she was ready to say, "I would rather have been a beggar in Canaan, with my husband and my sons about me, than be the possessor of everything in Moab without them" (*Tyng*). Note. *How vain and empty the world will seem to us when the day of a similar awakening comes!* (Luke xv. 16, 17.) Enjoyment gone, wealth vanished, hope departed, loved ones taken away, Moab begins to shew itself in its real character. Like the prodigal, Naomi "came to herself," and remembers now that there is bread enough and to spare in the Father's house.

We have here—

1. **The result of a mind's transition.** "She arose," a decided, and, in this case, a decisive step. The expression similar to that used in Luke xv. In all probability there would be several preliminary stages: first, the longing for home, then the resolve, then the act. Note. (*a*) *Right purposes are good so far as they go; to be profitable they must be followed by prompt and decisive action.* This is especially true in the critical moments of humanlife. Note. (*b*) *It is time to leave the place of our abode when the godly are taken away, and none left but the wicked to converse with* (*Bernard*).

The awakening, no doubt, was painful; but mark, it is the beginning of a new

life. Naomi's experience a very common one,—through sorrow to repentance, through bitterness to decision. Note. (*c*) *Adversity saves multitudes whom prosperity would possibly have destroyed.* The world becomes distasteful, the pleasures of Moab delight us no longer, rather they weary us. Then comes the old longing for home. Many a prodigal, many a backslider, has been brought to himself again in this way. Note. (*d*) *Such awakenings are the work of the Holy Spirit, though brought about by natural causes.* Possibly she had heard the Divine voice saying, "Arise ye, depart," etc. (Micah ii. 10, Isa. lii. 11) in a still more unmistakable manner. A simple word aroused Jacob, and sent him back to Bethel (Gen. xxxv. 1). The best men need such at times. (See next outline.)

We have here—

II. The influence of a right and wise decision, not only upon her own course of action, but upon "her daughters-in-law." If Elimelech's going to Moab had been the fatal thing in connection with his sons, Naomi's return is to be a blessing to one of the wives at least. This influence argues much in favour of Naomi's piety (cf. ver. 16) and her sweetness and beauty of character. Note. *The truly virtuous are of an attractive power* (*Bernard*). Goodness, even among infidels, will make itself friends. Orpah and Ruth ready to forsake their kindred, their country, and even their own mother, for a stranger whose affinity died with her sons (*Bishop Hall*).

We have here—

III. The reason of this immediate and decisive step. She had heard that the Lord had visited, etc. Note (*a*) *that God's mercy is here as elsewhere the keynote of man's return.* The pious Hebrew saw God in all things (*Cox*). Second causes had not as yet hidden the Almighty. A lesson for to-day; (1) in temporal affairs.

> "Happy the man who sees a God employed
> In all the good and ill that chequers life."—*Cowper.*

(2) in spiritual matters. In the larger sphere of human history, the fact that God has visited His people (Luke i. 68) is the great reason for man's return unto Him. More than this, (*b*) *We never shall return unto Him until we have seen the hand of God in human affairs.* Naomi's faith quickened her footsteps homeward, a faith which came by hearing: "*She had heard.*" *She believed*, and a simple trust in God solved all her difficulties. Hence "*she arose.*" The reasons for her remaining in Moab had ceased, if they ever existed. Now it was dangerous to remain. See the hand of God in all this leading her (Isa. lvii. 18). Recognize it even in the rumour, etc. Trifles in the moment of indecision may be angel-hands, guiding us homeward and Godward. Note (*c*) *Not all that is in Moab can keep the godly there, when God calls them away* (2 Cor. vi. 17, 18).

Bernard on "How that the Lord had visited His people":—

I. That God seeth His people in adversity and want, and cometh in His due time to help them. We are not to think ourselves forgotten in great extremities (Exod. iii. 7, 8), but rest in the stability of His love and promises.

II. That God hath ever had more specially a people for His own, called His people, called the sons of God (Gen. vi.). Not chosen out of any merit in them, but of His mere love (Deut. vii. 8; Eph. i. 4).

III. That corporal food and the necessaries of this life are God's gift. (Deut. xi. 14, 15; Hosea ii. 8, 9; Joel ii. 19). He makes the earth fruitful. Man without Him can do nothing (Ps. cxxvii. 2; Hag. i. 6; Deut. viii. 18).

Fuller on this—

By bread is meant all sustenance necessary for the maintaining of our lives, whereof bread is the chiefest. As the temple of Dagon principally leaned on two pillars, and fell to the ground when Samson took them away, so the buildings of our bodies chiefly rely on bread and water for outward sustenance, which being

taken away, they cannot but presently decay. Let others, therefore, wish those dishes which curiosity hath invented rather to increase than satisfy hunger, which are more delightsome to the eye than pleasing to the palate, yet more pleasing to the palate than wholesome to the stomach; let us pray, "Give us this day our daily bread."

Bread is a dish in every course: without this can be no feast, with this can be no famine.

"In all the ways of earthly feeling which man can take in order to seek his happiness, he must sooner or later fall into a death-like absence of joy; it becoming clear to him that he has fallen into a grievous delusion."—*Lange.*

"There had been a famine in Judah, but ah! she found a far worse famine in Moab. . . . . Her poverty when she arrived back again seems to argue other troubles besides bereavement. . . . . Far better was this beginning of a return with conscious emptiness to God than her former going out 'full.'"—*Tyng.*

"We know not precisely how the change was effected. . . . . Perhaps the Divine Spirit wrought by the power of memory, thawed the ice away from the frosted spirit by sunny pictures of the past—by the vision of the ancestral home."—*The Prodigal Son, Morley Punshon.*

"Whilst her husband and her sons lived, I hear no motion of retiring home: now these earthly stays are removed, she thinks presently of removing to her country. Neither can we so heartily think of our home above, while we are furnished with these worldly contentments; when God strips us of them, straightway our mind is homeward."—*Bishop Hall.*

"How often is it that in this way the darkest day is the beginning of the brightest life. Reverses, difficulties, trials, are often amongst God's best blessings. From the loss of property is brought out very often the latent energies of character, a power to suffer and to act which, in the querulous being, without a wish ungratified, you would have scarcely said existed at all."—*Robertson.*

"To Naomi there comes the voice, 'Arise, this is not your rest, it is polluted.' Like the prodigal, for the first time she felt in her heart, if she did not give utterance with her lips, 'I will arise and go to Bethlehem, the house of bread, my Father's house.'"—*Dr. Cumming.*

"It has been well and beautifully said that woman has no life but in her family. While her husband and sons lived, their home was hers—there was the scene of her duties, there of her affections; but now those ties were broken, she was called on to act for herself; and with energy and with dignity she did act. Israel was her proper home; and now it was seen, perhaps for the first time, that her heart was there."—*Macartney.*

"All are not taken; there are left behind
Living beloveds, tender looks to bring
And make the daylight still a happy thing,
And tender voices to make soft the wind:
But if it were not so—if I could find
No love in all the world for comforting,
Nor any path but hollowly did ring
Where 'dust to dust' the love from life disjoined,
And if, before those sepulchres unmoving,
I stood alone (as some forsaken lamb
Goes bleating up the moors in weary dearth),
Crying, 'Where are ye, O my loved and loving?'—
I know a voice would sound, 'Daughter, I AM:
Can I suffice for HEAVEN, and not for earth?'"
Mrs. Browning.

"When Naomi, the aged widow, proposed to return to Bethlehem, the two young widows were so charmed with her faith, so struck with her meek submission beneath a load that would have crushed the strongest giant in the land of Moab, so convinced that this aged widow had some spring of consolation that the world had not, some sweet source of peace that they knew not of, that both the young widows, under impulsive attachment to a beautiful character, resolved at all hazards to go with her."—*Dr. Cumming.*

"I suppose when any messenger arrived in Moab out of the land of Canaan, Naomi did presently repair unto him and lead him with questions concerning the estate of her country. For nine years Naomi had no news, but of want and scarcity; yet the tenth year there came a man who brought her word that the valleys began to laugh and sing with plenty."—*Fuller.*

"Let none therefore pretend in needless excuses to linger in the land of Egypt when they may return unto the honey-flowing land of Canaan. Joseph must not tarry, with his wife and son, when he is dead that sought the life of the child."—*Fuller.*

VERSE 7.

Theme.—THE HOMEWARD PILGRIMAGE.

"What though the radiance which was once so bright
Be now for ever taken from my sight,

Though nothing can bring back the hour
Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower;
We will grieve not, rather find
Strength in what remains behind
In the primal sympathy
Which having been ever must be,
In the soothing thoughts that spring
Out of human suffering,
In the faith that looks through death,
In years that bring the philosophic mind."—*Wordsworth.*

Wherefore she went forth out of the place.

The real commencement of the narrative as it concerns the *true* history of Ruth. All else preparatory, explanatory, introductory. A fresh starting-point in the history of Naomi. Poor, solitary, and almost broken-hearted,—yet this is the most promising hour of her life. Her prosperity dates from it, begins to dawn when the night of affliction seems darkest. Divine wisdom has put a boundary to this deep sea of affliction, and said, "Here thy proud waves shall be stayed." Christ suffered Peter to sink, not to perish—Jonah to be overwhelmed, not destroyed—sent Titus lest Paul should be swallowed up of sorrow (2 Cor. vii. 6). Note. *No state so bad, no circumstance so desperate, as to be considered altogether hopeless.* With God's children the smoking furnace of temptation usually precedes the smiling lamp of gospel consolation.—*Macgowan.*

In connection with this return, notice—

I. The thought and purpose. The home ties which bound Naomi to Moab exist no longer. Her husband dead; like Israel, happy only as she realizes that her Maker is her husband (Isa. liv. 5), all things are ready, and now her face is set towards Bethlehem. Returns like these the human response to the Divine appeal, "I am married unto you" (Jer. iii. 14). When they spring up in the heart of the true Israelite, where else can they lead but to the land of the sanctuary and the promises? Necessary then and always that men should renew their spiritual youth—trace back the path until they have assurance that they are standing on holy ground. Jacob responded to a similar appeal, and went back to Bethel, the place of the covenant (Gen. xxx.). Note. (*a*) *Homeward with such often, perhaps always, means Godward.* Life seems to move in a circle sometimes, departing only to come back again; wandering afar to return at length, finding itself at last at the point from whence it started. *Christian experience knows something of this.* With many, as years advance, there is a return to the old landmarks, to the simplicity of old experiences, to the faith and theology learnt around a mother's knee. You may picture many an experience in this way—an oasis of childhood and an oasis of old age, and between them the barren waste, scorched of passion, and laid desolate of sin, which men call *life.* With Naomi, and with all, the past irreparable, but the future availing. Note (*b*) in connection with this return, the Divine intention must have embraced two things—(1) *The renewal of a past consecration;* (2) *The revival of a past spiritual life.*

Notice, **II. The significant fact.** Men may rise from this lowness and deadness, to this earnestness and newness of life, in a moment and with a word. Samson is caught in the Delilah spell, and bound with the Philistine bonds, but something of the old strength lingers (Judges xvi. 8—15). Note. (*a*) *A plain distinction between the true Israelite and those who know not God*—enough for hope, not enough for presumption. The child carries the home instincts wherever the path may lead; the alien has never known them, though he lives in the Father's house. Naomi an illustration of this. Life without God, a desert to which the sweet rains of heaven bring no fertility. But life with this thought of God in the heart, hidden, slumbering, like the parched and thirsty earth, which may revive again in the time of the latter rain. Naomi's past history in Moab may have been a dead and barren one. In no single point had her condition been improved by the change. Her experience the type of a very common Christian

experience. The freshness of first love—gone. The glow of zeal and the ardour of devotion—a thing of the past. The joy of believing—well-nigh forgotten. Now love has torments, and faith is full of fears, and devotion is a burden. Note. (*b*) *For such there is a return:* (1) *it may be now;* (2) *it may be accepted;* (3) *it may be final and for ever.* We are to think of it as necessary—as not impossible—as not too late.

"In December, the days grow shorter till the twenty-first, the shortest day, when, at a precise moment, the sun pauses and begins to return towards the north. . . . . So there is a precise moment when the soul pauses in its departure from God, and begins to return towards Him. The fruits of that return may not be at once visible; there may be long interior conflicts before the coldness and deadness of the heart is overcome; but at length the good will triumph, and instead of winter and desolation, all the Christian graces will spring up in the summer of divine love."—*Beecher.*

"With fettered steps we left our pleasant land,
Envying our fathers in their peaceful grave.
The strangers' bread with bitter tears we steep;
And when our weary eyes should sink to sleep,
'Neath the murk midnight we steal forth to weep. . . . .
The born in sorrow shall bring forth in joy;
Thy mercy, Lord, shall lead Thy children home.
And Canaan's vines for us their fruits shall bear,
And Hermon's bees their honeyed stores prepare." *Milman.*

"Like Bunyan's pilgrim when he had slept in the bowers of ease, there is to be that humiliating journey, which is not forward, but backward, until the lost treasure has been recovered."—*B.*

"The Bethlehem of the past may become the Bethlehem of the future, once again 'a house of bread' to God's chosen people, if they will only turn their faces thitherward. It may seem a pilgrimage of penitence and sorrow—the path slopes backward and downward—but new consecration is new life, and this is the repentance which needs not to be repented of."—*B.*

"As in music there are particular key-notes, so also in the whole wide life of the world and of man. Life has a deep key-note which answers to the note of life in its bloom. It is called return—return to God—return home—and it is accompanied with a longing after home."—*Lange.*

"She arose to return, not to another idolatrous land, but 'home.'"—*Tyng.*

"Memory is busy, and upon her painted fancy she pictures the home-scenes of the happy past. . . . . Anxiety is busy, and she projects her wonder into the nearing future, and speculates upon the probabilities of her reception."—*Punshon.*

"There is not a trouble so deep and swift-running that we may not cross safely over, if we have courage to steer, and strength to pull."—*Beecher.*

VERSES 8—10.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.—*Ver.* 8, 10. **And Naomi said** [Then said Naomi] **unto.** The first recorded utterance of Naomi. Cox imagines them having reached the ford of the Arnon [N. boundary of Moab], or perhaps the fords of the Jordan [E. boundary of Judah]. **Go, return each.** Shews that they were not natural sisters (*Bernard*). **To her mother's house.** The mention of the *mother's* house, which the separation of the women's house or tent from that of the men facilitates, is natural . . . . has more tenderness . . . . does not imply the death of their fathers (*Speaker's Com.*). Ruth's father was still alive (ii. 11) (cf. Lev. xxii. 13). **The Lord deal kindly with you.** Lit. Jehovah do kindness with you. In עִמָּכֶם the suffix is masc., although referring to women, a colloquial inaccuracy found in conversations (*Lange*). **With the dead.** The Papists expound it, that these women did fast and pray for the souls of their deceased husbands (*Fuller*). The sense is in all probability, "You have been kind to your husbands, who now are dead, whilst they were living." Fuller thinks, however, that more may be implied. **The Lord** [Jehovah] **grant you.** The pronouns in these verses are surprisingly corrupt in the Hebrew (*Kennicott*). Originally colloquial inaccuracies (*Gesen.*). [See Intro. par. 2.] So with the verbs. When courage, virility, fortitude, efficiency, or the like, is intended to be predicated of females, these verbs are put in the masculine gender (*Prof. Lee*). All but two of these inaccuracies are actually found in conversations (*Lange*). **Ye may find rest** [a resting-place] **each in the house of her husband.** She wished them happier marriages than they had with her sons, who were so soon taken from them (*Josephus*). In the East of antiquity, the position of an unmarried woman a very unhappy and perilous one (*Cox*). The Hebrews spoke of the husband's house as a woman's "menuchah," or "rest," —her secure and happy asylum from servitude, neglect, license (*Cox, Lange*). On the construction see Gesen. 130. **Then she kissed them.** To take leave of them (*Keil*). So Gen.

xxxi. 28, 55 ; 2 Sam. xix, 39 ; Acts xx. 37. Gave them her parting kiss, as the Jews call it (*Gill*). A rejection of every form of homage proceeds from superstition rather than from Scripture usage (*Macgowan*). **And they said, "Surely."** כִּי before a direct statement serves to strengthen it, and it is almost equivalent to a positive assurance (*Keil, Wright*). Not true in all cases (*Lange*). Dr. Cassel trans. "for," but first supplies, "We will not turn back." Best taken like *ort* in the New Testament before words directly quoted (*Lange*). Not so, but to be translated as "certainly" (*Wright*) ; "nay" (*Geddes, Cox*); in an adversative sense as "but" (*Rosen.*). **We will return.** To be proselyted (*Targum*).

VERSE 8.

Theme.—THE FIRST TRIAL OF AFFECTION.

"O friendship! of all things the
Most rare, and therefore most rare because most
Excellent; whose comforts in misery
Are always sweet, and whose counsels in
Prosperity are ever fortunate."—*Lilly.*

And Naomi said, ... Go, return each to her mother's house.

The farewell greetings of friends, the words spoken in parting—everything connected with such moments—will tend to draw out our truer and deeper characteristics, as well as our tenderest and holiest feelings. Having travelled some distance, Naomi's unselfish nature manifests itself (*Braden*). Silence has commended her virtues so far. It would seem she had not urged Orpah and Ruth to go with her even to this distance. We are not to see her, however, in what follows, as careless of their best interest. They are *to go willingly* and knowing what lies before them, *if they are to go wisely*. The Targum puts this in a very striking manner [cf. Crit. Note on ver. 16]. Of course their presence would have been a comfort to Naomi. But note. *A true lover is loath to disadvantage friends for the sake of private interests* (*Bernard*).

We have here—

I. The care and thoughtfulness of a generous spirit for the outward estate of others. She knew they had friends in Moab, none in Judah. Even a friendship like hers could scarcely supply the place of a mother's love. *Go, return each to her mother's house.* To go forward with her might be for the saving of their souls. Might there not also be something of selfishness in this ? Note. *Our efforts for the good of others need to be watched very narrowly when they coincide with our own interests.* Selfishness the most subtle and insidious of all sins. Judas an instance of one who under a plausible pretext cloaked the most mercenary motives (John xii. 6). If Naomi errs at all, she errs on that side which demands a sacrifice of her convenience and feelings. Her sense of justice and love towards these young warm-hearted women will not allow her to reap any advantage at their cost (*Braden*). She would not have them come to Bethlehem merely on her account. Notice. (*a*) *Self-love contrary to Christ's commands;* against the true fellowship of Christians one with another ; contrary to the end of our calling (1 Cor. x. 24 ; 2 Cor. xii. 14 ; Eph. iv. 28). (*b*) *A sin as between man and man.* Contrary to that care which God commands for the preservation of other men's estates (Deut. xxii. 2—4 ; Exod. xxiii. 4, 5). (*c*) *A sin as between man and God.* Self-love is idolatry. Note. True religion will shew its influence in every part of our conduct ; like the sap of a living tree, which penetrates the most distant boughs.

II. A fair test and trial of the fervour and sincerity of those who have already been influenced towards good things. The deepest religious interests were involved. A choice like this not to be made lightly and from mere personal motives as towards ourselves. Our social influence may be consecrated, but questions like these are to be decided on a higher ground.

Naomi would try (*a*) the strength of their affection to herself. Rather she would see (*b*) whether nature wrought more powerfully than grace (*Bernard*).

So Christ tried those who followed Him (Luke ix. 57, 58). The young ruler (Mark x. 17—22). Note. *With those who have been led towards holy things by the force of a noble and consecrated life, a similar time of testing is sure to come.* The Saviour puts it in one strong and expressive phrase (Luke xiv. 26). The hour arrives when every secondary consideration, every subordinate motive, is counted as nothing in the balances. The momentous question stands on its own merits, and asks of us a deliberate choice. Notice that the same issues were involved here as upon Carmel (1 Kings xviii. 21).

"It is no sign of friendship to draw others into any calamity for our comfort's sake, however much they may press it. Bear the burden bravely alone, if it be possible, and do not crush another heart, though it plead with generous sympathy to share the load."—*Braden.*

"Naomi could not be so insensible of her own good as not to know how much comfort she might reap to the solitariness both of her voyage and her widowhood by the society of these two younger widows, whose affection she had so well tried; even every partnership is a mitigation of evils; yet so earnestly doth she dissuade them from accompanying her, as that she could not have said more, if she had thought their presence irksome and burdensome. Good dispositions love not to pleasure themselves with the disadvantage of others; and had rather be miserable alone, than to draw in partners to their sorrow; for the sight of another's calamity doth rather double their own; and if themselves were free, would affect them with compassion. As contrarily, ill minds care not how many companions they have in misery, nor how few consorts in good; if themselves miscarry, they would be content all the world were enwrapped with them in the same distress."—*Bishop Hall.*

"A sound-hearted friend will follow the apostle's advice, not seeking his own, but his friend's welfare. True love will not make worse, where it cannot make better."—*Bernard.*

"Many give counsel like lawyers for their fees, but few like Naomi for their conscience. She loves their company well, but counsels their safety better."—*Topsell.*

"It is harder for me than for you that we must part. But the hand of the Lord is gone out against me. I have no hope for the future. I must walk my darkened path alone. But you, you may still find an asylum with the people of your own race. Go then and return each to her mother's house."—*Cox.*

"Maternal love knows best how to comfort a daughter in affliction."—*Keil.*

"Here we see widows, if poor, are to be maintained by their parents. These widows (1 Tim. v. 16) were not to be burdensome to the Church, but to be relieved by their own kindred."—*Fuller.*

"If religion does not make us lovely and amiable in our family relations, it does nothing for us, but deceives us to our ruin."—*Simeon.*

"Ittai the Gittite, when following David in his flight from Absalom, was urged to leave him, as Elisha also was repeatedly by Elijah, previous to his assumption to heaven. There was no positive duty lying upon them, or, at all events, none which David and Elijah were not at liberty to dispense with."—*Simeon.*

VERSES 8, 9.

Theme.—A BENEDICTION AND A VALEDICTION.

"Wouldst thou from sorrow find a sweet relief?
Or is thy heart oppressed with woes untold?
Balm wouldst thou gather for corroding grief?
Pour blessings round thee like a shower of gold."—*Charles Wilcox.*

The Lord deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt, etc.
The Lord grant you that ye may find rest, etc.

A scene now begins of unequalled tenderness and amiableness (*Lange*). The inspired words, "She openeth her mouth with wisdom, and in her tongue is the law of kindness" (Prov. xxxi. 26) truly verified in Naomi. The speech seasoned with salt (Col. iv. 6), her words breathe all the fervour of piety and the warmth of a self-denying love. We find in them (*a*) a generous recognition of the worth of these two young women, and (*b*) an affectionate regard for their future welfare. This generous, unselfish spirit, one of the secrets of Naomi's influence. Note. *If we had more like Naomi in the Church, we might expect to win more like Ruth*

from the world. See how takingly love behaves itself in every condition, on every occasion, to every person, and about everything (*Pennington*). It sees God in all things, and all things in God.

The text contains, **I. A prayer.** Like David, her eyes are unto the Lord (Ps. xxv. 15). She could not part without praying with and for them (*Maegowan*). Poor and destitute, she had no other means of requiting their kindness (*Fuller*). No other was necessary. A prayer like this better than all gifts. Goes up in a shower of tears, but descends in a shower of blessings—returns laden with comfort, like the southern winds in Egypt, whose wings are charged with the sweet odours of spices (*Penn*).

Notice. Naomi prayed with equal earnestness for both. Did not know which the Lord had chosen (*Macgowan*).

She asks for them (*a*) The favour of God; His kindness, smile, benediction—all the Hebrews would include under their beautiful phrase, "The light of His countenance (Numb. vi. 26; Ps. iv. 6, xl. 3, lxxxix. 15); (*b*) The comforts and blessings which with God's approval would flow from a second marriage. Only in the house of a husband could a woman be sure of respect and protection (*Cox*). (See Crit. and Ex. Notes.) The prayer agrees with the apostle's direction (1 Tim. v. 14), which applies to young widows like Orpah and Ruth. (*c*) And these in the measure they had meted to the dead (cf. Matt. vii. 2; Col. iii. 23, 24) and to her.

Notice. (1) *Duties honourably fulfilled in the past come in to bring a blessing upon us in the present.* Who would not wish for a similar commendation to this of the text? especially with regard to our treatment of the dead. They had given good measure, pressed down, running over; now it is returned to them. When mothers-in-law will thus freely testify of their sons' wives, it is evident that duty has been nobly fulfilled; for they usually set up a high standard (*Braden*). An instinctive conviction in every heart that God will reward us according to our treatment of others (Judges i. 6; Rom. ii. 15; cf. also Exod. xxi. 23—25; 1 Sam. xv. 33; James ii. 13).

(2) *That dutiful conduct has few sweeter rewards in this world than its acknowledgment.* Even aliens to the hope of Israel have experienced this. Ruth does not appear to have exceeded Orpah in affection for those who were gone. The commendation shared equally by both. Shews, on the other hand, that moral and social virtues, and the faultless discharge of the duties of this life, offer no suitable ground for the hope of salvation. How many wives, as tender and sympathetic as Orpah, have gone back again, and been unfaithful to the little light which has shone upon them from God! Yet, even with these, no act of kindness, no self-sacrifice, no silent deed of love, is unknown to Him.

(3) *That prayer for us gains warmth and power by what men see in us.* Every wish is a prayer with God (*Mrs. Browning*). The warmest wishes will in the main follow the most worthy. Live well! and the prayers of the good will gain in faith and confidence. So Paul evidently regarded Timothy (2 Tim. i. 3—6).

The text contains, **II. A valediction.** Her motherly benediction was the best valediction (*Trapp*). She blesses them not in the name of Chemosh, but in the name of Jehovah (*Lawson*). Gold and silver she had not for them, but that which was better, heartiest orisons and well-wishes (*Trapp*). A heart impelled by love and self-devotion does much to invest the scene with its sacred charm. No priest like Melchisedec, yet Naomi blesses them as the patriarch blessed Abraham —as Simeon blessed the infant Christ and His mother (Luke ii. 34), with like faith, and a like trust in God (*ib.* 28)—as Elizabeth blessed Mary (*ib.* i. 42—45).

Note. *Love amid its own sorrows will still think of the welfare of others.* Has a word of comfort and kind wishes in what is intended to be the hour of separation. We get a glimpse here (1) *Into a family life that may serve as a model for all* (*Lange*). What a picture of peace and happiness does it suggest! The women have not only heard the religion of Jehovah confessed in Moab, but they have

seen the expression of it in the life (*Lange*). Never more so than now. (2) *Into the way in which the godly used and made memorable the separations which come in life* (cf. Gen. xxviii. 1—3, xxxi. 55, xliii. 14). So Paul commended the elders of Ephesus to God (Acts xx. 32). So Jonathan separated from David (1 Sam. xx. 42). Men do it now, but not with that reverence and earnest desire meet and befitting in such a case (*Bernard*).

Bernard on this—

I. That it is a duty to pray for those who do either us or ours good (ii. 12; 1 Sam. xxv. 33, and xxiv. 19).

II. That, at parting, friends are to pray one for another (Gen. xxviii. 1—3, xxxi. 55, xliii. 14; Acts xx. 36).

III. That the godly are persuaded that the Lord is a merciful rewarder of the duties of love which one doth toward another (Col. iii. 24).

IV. That children should so well deserve of parents, yea, though but parents-in-law, as that they may be moved heartily to pray for them.

V. That God will not only barely reward, but so deal with us as we deal with others.

As ye have dealt with the dead and with me.

I. That daughters of a bad race may prove good wives and good children-in-law sometimes.

II. That good and truely loving wives love their husbands' parents for their husbands' sake.

The Lord grant you that ye may find rest.

I. That godly and wise friends pray not only in general, but in particular, as they know them to stand in need, for whom they pray.

II. That godly mothers-in-law are hearty well-wishers to their children-in-law.

III. That second marriages are lawful.

IV. That husbands are to be their wives' rest.

V. That it is God's blessing to be peaceably married

Fuller remarks on *kindly . . . . as ye have dealt with the dead*:—

A godly man dying, leaves behind him,

First, his *body;* to which we must be kind by burial and lamentation.

Secondly, his *estate;* to which we must be kind by careful and faithful administration.

Thirdly, his *children, friends, or kindred;* to whom we must be kind by love and affection.

Fourthly, his *faults and failings;* to which we must be kind by silence and suppression.

Fifthly, his *memory and virtues;* to which we must be kind by congratulation, commemoration, and imitation.

"Prayer eases the soul in times of distress, when it is oppressed with griefs and fears, by giving them vent, and that in so advantageous a way, emptying them into the bosom of God. The very vent, were it but into the air, gives ease; or speak your grief rather to a statue than smother it; much more ease does it give to pour it forth into the lap of a confidential and sypathising friend, even though unable to help us; yet still more of one who can help; and of all friends, our God is, beyond all comparison, the surest, and most affectionate, and most powerful."—*Leighton.*

"The words of parting friends, who are likely never to meet again, make an impression not to be erased. They are like the words of the dying; for our friends are dead to us when we see them no more."—*Lawson.*

"Our duties which we discharge to parents or husbands are as pledges before the Lord to do good unto us. . . . . Goodness procureth goodness, and evil begetteth evil, like as birds breed birds, and fishes fishes."—*Topsell.*

"When the tribe of Reuben, Gad, and half Manasses erected the altar Ed at the passage over Jordan, it startled all the rest of the tribes, as if under it they had hatched some superstitious design; whereas indeed the altar was not intended for sacrifice, but was merely an altar of memorial, to evidence to posterity that these two tribes

and a half, though divided from the rest, were conjoined with them in the worship of the same God. In like manner, when some ministers thank God for the departure of His servants, some people are so weak, and some so wilful, to condemn such for passages of Popery, as if superstitious prayers were made for their departure; whereas, indeed, such congratulation, on the contrary, speaks our confidence on their present bliss and happiness, and continueth the Church militant with the Church triumphant, as the completing one entire Catholic Church of Jesus Christ."—*Fuller.*

"It is the best remembrance of our dead progenitors to follow their virtues. St. Paul cannot look upon Timothy, but presently calls to mind his mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois, though the latter, no doubt, was long since departed."—*Fuller.*

"Men and women were joined in marriage (Gen. ii.) to the end to be a mutual help one to the other; but many prove such helpers as the king of Assyria did to Ahaz (2 Chron. xxvii. 20), of whom it is said, 'He distressed him, but helped him not.'"—*Fuller.*

"A man's best fortune or his worst is his wife."—*English Proverb.*

"It is an honour to the deceased sons, Mahlon and Chilion, that they made such a selection of wives; but they must also have been worthy of the enduring love they awakened, notwithstanding that there were no children to strengthen the bonds of affection. The attachment of the Moabitish women, Ruth and Orpah, to their new family must be grounded on psychological facts, with a knowledge of which exegesis cannot dispense. The Moabitish women had entered into an Israelitish house, and had breathed the beneficent atmosphere of a family of Judah. Marriage and family life form the real mirror of religious belief and worship. Hence the apostle, in his sublime manner, arranges the relations of husband and wife by referring to the love of Christ for His Church (Eph. v. 22). Ancient Israel therefore distinguished itself from the inhabitants of Canaan, not merely by the name of its God, but by its life at home in the family, by faithfulness and love to wife and child. Purity and morality in marriage were the necessary results of faith in the only living God."—*Lange.*

"The unhappy relations between daughter and mother-in-law, elsewhere usual, must in general have been unknown in Israel. Otherwise the prophet could not represent it as a sign of the extremest social ruin that as the son against the father and the daughter against the mother, so (Micah vii. 6) the daughter-in-law rises up against the mother-in-law."—*Lange.*

"The mother-in-law has forgotten that she was ever a daughter-in-law. The best mother-in-law is one who is dead."—*German Proverbs.*

"Here we learn, God, in the rewarding of the good deeds of His servants, dealeth with them accordingly as they have done with others. Yet far be it from us to suppose that in our stained and imperfect works there is any meritorious virtue, which deserveth that God should proportion a reward unto them: but this freely proceedeth from God's favour, who, to encourage us in well-doing, will not suffer a cup of cold water to pass without its reward. Do we desire, then, to leave dutiful children and faithful servants hereafter? Let us be dutiful to our parents, faithful to our masters. On the other side, hath God afflicted us with Zibahs to our servants, and with Absaloms to our sons? Let us reflect our eyes on that which is past, and call ourselves to account, whether we formerly have not been unfaithful to our masters, undutiful to our parents: no doubt we may then take up the confession of Adonibezek: 'As I have dealt with others, so the Lord hath done to me.'"—*Fuller.*

> "Benign restorer of the soul,
> Who ever fliest to bring relief,
> When first we feel the rude control
> Of Love or Pity, Joy or Grief."—*Rogers, On a Tear.*

Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voice and wept.

In every life these sudden outbursts of feeling. The clouds do not gather and the showers fall more naturally than sorrow expresses itself in tears. Christ Himself has shewn us that even a perfect humanity is not outside the realm of this law (John xi.). Note. (*a*) *Apathy is not fortitude.* The Christian is no Stoic. Firmness with him is to exist side by side with the tenderest susceptibilities (Eccles. iii. 4, vii. 2; Rom. xii. 15).

Times even when a loud and demonstrative sorrow like this is appropriate; *They lifted up their voice and wept.* So the Ephesian elders said farewell to Paul (Acts xx. 37, 38), "sorrowing most of all that they should see his face no more." So with these three widows. Their love was a passion of the heart, breaking forth into wailing and weeping (*Bernard*). Note. (*b*) *Community of trials unites human hearts, as fire unites metals* (*Dr. Waugh*).

They wept—

I. At the recollection of the many endearing and joyful circumstances of the

past. Their tears a tribute to the love which bound them so closely together to the memories they shared in common, and to "the dead," with whom they had dealt so faithfully. The very joy which had been theirs comes in now to enhance their sorrow. Naomi's reference to the past (ver. 8) probably the key to this affecting scene.

II. At the realization of their poverty and defenceless condition. So far, however, love was strengthened rather than abated by their trials. Affliction had evidently drawn them closer together. Note. *There is a charitable and holy weeping for the miseries of others* (*Bernard*), *and of our own.*

III. At the very thought of a separation as possible. Adieu!—more tears have been shed at that word than at the utterance of any other. Separation!—a mysterious, if a familiar subject. Its shadow seems to have fallen upon the spirit of Christ Himself as He wept at the tomb of Lazarus. With these young women, Naomi's kiss meant their dismissal, and they wept at the thought of parting with one who had so endeared herself to them. Note. *One of the sorest afflictions incident to this life is the everlasting separation of those who are mutually dear to each other* (*Lawson*).

IV. In protestation of their fidelity. Possibly the bitterest trial of all with both was that Naomi should doubt their willingness to go with her, and thus put it to the test. The event (ver. 14) proved that Naomi was right. So Peter viewed the words of Christ (Mark xiv. 27—31), and protested "the more vehemently." Note. *Tears are not always a proof of an enduring fidelity.* Orpah and Peter both sincere, but mistaken. So present sorrow for sin is not to be taken always as a sign of ultimate repentance. Many who have wept with Christ, it may be, as well as many who have done wonderful works in His name, will be found at last saying, "Lord, Lord, open unto us" (Matt. vii. 22; Luke xiii. 25).

Bernard on this—

Then she kissed them. This action we may find fourfold: *carnal*, as in fleshly lust; *hypocritical*, as it was with Job and Judas; *holy*, of which the apostle speaks (1 Cor. xvi. 20); or *civil*, as here used at the meeting of friends (Gen. xxix. 11, xxxiii. 4), at their departing (Gen. xxxi. 55). It was honestly used to testify love and unity; therefore in the primitive Church, before they received the sacrament, they thus saluted one another.

And they lifted up their voice and wept.

Weeping is used in Scripture—I. To express sorrow at the parting of friends (2 Kings xiii. 14; 1 Sam. xx. 41); II. For very joy (Gen. xlv. 14, xlvi. 29, xxix. 11); III. In pity and compassion at the misery of others (Job xxx. 25; Jer. iv. 19; Luke xix. 41); IV. At the apprehension of kindness (1 Sam. xxiv. 16).

"Observe the beautiful simplicity of Scripture, which counts it not a thing unmanly to own that Abraham, the stern, iron-hearted saint, has wept. Joseph 'lifted up his voice and wept,' Jacob, Peter, Christ, are all said to have wept. Contrast this with the conventional feeling which represents grief as unworthy manhood."—*Robertson.*

"Tears! what are tears? The babe weeps in its cot;
The mother singing; at her marriage-bell
The bride weeps, and before the oracle
Of high-faned hills the poet has forgot
Such moisture on his cheeks. Thank God for grace.
Ye who weep only! If as some have done,
Ye grope tear-blinded in a desert place,
And touch but tombs,—look up! those tears will run
Soon in long rivers down the lifted face,
And leave the vision clear for stars and sun."
Mrs. Browning.

"Who never wept"—What right have you to say that of angels? None! I own to none in revelation, none in reason, none in anything, except a spontaneous and universal idea."—*Elihu Burritt.*

"Through the dim windows of affliction how changed is the aspect of the world! how cold, and grey, and desolate, all its radiant glory departed, all its beauteous hues reduced to one dull leaden sadness! The tears of sorrow are like spiritual lenses, shewing us the world in its true character, as a poor, empty, unsatisfying thing."—*Anon.*

"It is better for a Christian to be sorrowful, than secure as the people of the world are."—*Luther.*

"Adversity is the only furnace of friendship. If love will not abide both fire and anvil, it is but counterfeit: so in our love to God we do but crack and vaunt in vain, if we cannot be willing to suffer for Him."—*Bishop Hall.*

"The observation here may be the same which the Jews collected (John xi.), which, when they saw our Saviour weep for Lazarus, they said, 'Behold how He loved him!' So these tears in this place were the expression of their affection. Sorrow, like the river of Jordan in the first month, did overflow the banks, and streamed water down their cheeks."—*Fuller.*

"She dismissed them with great affection: *she kissed them*, wished she had somewhat better to give them, but silver and gold she had none. However, this parting kiss shall be the seal of such a true friendship as (though she never see them more) she will while she lives retain the pleasing remembrance of. If relations must part, let them thus part in love, that they may (if they never meet again in this world) meet in the world of everlasting love."—*Matthew Henry.*

"What precious drops are those
Which silently each other's track pursue,
Bright as young diamonds in their infant dew?" *Dryden.*

"The rose is sweetest washed with morning dew,
And love is loveliest when embalmed in tears." *Scott.*

VERSE 10.

Theme.—THE PROMISING COMMENCEMENT.

"Call to thy God for grace to keep
Thy vows, and if thou break them weep—
Weep for thy broken vows, and vow again.
Vows made with tears cannot be still in vain."—*Herbert.*

And they said unto her, Surely we will return with thee.

Youth is the season of warm and generous emotions. Renewed proofs of Naomi's affection only bind these young women to her with stronger ties (*Braden*). Such a love a chain not easily broken (*Braden*). Note. (*c*) *In all this we are to see the reward of a godly affection and a consistent walk.* Piety, wherever found, has the power to win the hearts of people (*Starke*). She won love because she was Naomi, "pleasant" (*Lange*). She cherished no vanity, sought no strife, and did not wish to rule; hence she had peace and love (*Lange*). (*b*) *We should so live that others by our good example may be drawn to love the truth* (Gen. xxxiv. 31; Luke viii. 16). Naomi's character sheds a lustre upon a whole nation. For thy sake we are drawn in love with the whole people (*Topsell*). Besides, to follow and go with Naomi, meant to serve the Lord. So Ruth understood it afterwards (ver. 16), and we can scarcely imagine Orpah intending to serve Chemosh now she resolves to go forward with Naomi. (*c*) *Many infidels and carnal persons are sooner drawn to the Lord by the works which they see than by the words which they hear* (*Topsell*).

We have—

I. An apparent agreement. They walk together—journey on the same road, are engaged in the same object, apparently with the same results. Now they protest in the same language. Worthy of attention, that their first utterance recorded by the inspired writer is a vow of fidelity to Naomi. Their choice voluntary, made with seeming deliberation, and after being urged very earnestly and affectionately in a contrary direction.

See in this—

(1) *An encouraging and happy commencement.* Naomi can rejoice for the present, in not knowing the difference between them, and the Divine record gives no sign as yet. God only knows the Orpah from the Ruth at this stage, outwardly there is nothing to distinguish them. Note. *It is ours to rejoice in the beginnings of good things, irrespective of after results.* Not for us to turn any back (*Tyng*). We should encourage and not suspect, rejoice rather than criticize. The Christian is the sower of the good seed, not the separater between the tares and the wheat. God's command to-day, Let both grow together until the harvest (Matt. xiii. 30).

(2) *A purpose good and commendable so far as it was carried out.* We will

return, etc. So they both said, and said as they thought (*Trapp*). No reason to doubt the sincerity of either (*Lawson*). For awhile they travelled happily and affectionately together, and there seemed no prospect of their separation. So in the heavenward journey with the believer and the mere professor. Whatever can be done in religious appearance in the world, and without an absolute separation of the heart from the world, they may have in common (*Tyng*). Journey together to the very extremities of Moab. Note. *We mistake life, and read it amiss, when we look for those fine distinctions between the righteous and the wicked which shall one day be made apparent.*

We have here—

II. A startling contrast. Undeveloped, unseen as yet, but real and already apparent in the eyes of God. Orpah upon second thoughts did otherwise (*Trapp*). The impulse with her good, but frail. She lacked the deep earnestness of Ruth. The seed sprang up, but it withered "immediately" (Matt. xiii. 5, 6). Her choice the result of passion, and an earthly affection, not rooted in longings after God and the true Israel, as with her sister-in-law (ver. 16). She loved Naomi, but even with all this her affections were back in Moab. And so even now the thorns were springing up which were to choke the good seeds of a noble resolution, made and partially carried out.

So in spiritual things it is not every blossom which comes to fruit. *They fall away* (Luke viii. 13) speedily, miserably, inexplicably, irrevocably. Note. *A conversion in the understanding, sentiment, or imagination may be a flower, but will be fruitless* (*Oosterzee*). The promise is not the performance; beginning well is not always a sign of ending well. There is a great difference between the same mind at different times. Saul in a passion promised fair (1 Sam. xxiv. 16, 17, xxvi. 21), but David knew there was no trusting to either his tears or his talk (*Trapp*). Note. *Strong passions, without a settled judgment, commonly produce weak resolutions* (*Matthew Henry*).

Lessons (1) How short-lived are the noblest purposes when made in our own strength! Like the morning cloud and the early dew (Hos. vi. 3). Orpah and Ephraim, types of those only too common in our churches. (2) We ought not to mistake every determination to walk with God's people as a sign of true grace. Regeneration is a change of heart, not a mere momentary change of habit. (See also on ver. 14.)

Macgowan on this—

I. Promises of speech and purposes of heart, whether to God, to His Church, or to individuals, ought to go hand in hand. If a man's word does not express his meaning and bind him, nothing can.

II. Promises and purposes often proceed from passion instead of principle. Exemplified in young converts who have a passionate regard to the person or manner of a preacher. Saul, overcome with David's kindness, promised that he would not seek his hurt.

III. Promises and purposes proceeding merely from passion soon fall to the ground. "I go, sir," one said in the Gospels, and "went not." Some persons melting under the ministry of the word as a summer brook (Job vi. 15—20). *A changed heart necessary to perseverance.* Saul may have religious fits, and Jehu much zeal; for want of a regenerated nature both come to nothing.

Bernard on this—

I. *Surely we will return.* **An earnest affection suffereth not easily a separation from the party affected.** True love liveth in the party beloved, and can no more forsake him than it can forsake itself.

II. *With thee.* **It is better to have the company of one sound Christian, than to enjoy the fellowship of a world of worldlings.** Jonathan took more delight in one David than in the society of all his father's house. The godly are such as go the way to eternal life. Whosoever looks for them must keep them company thither.

III. *Unto Thy people.* **There is a right in every particular member to the Church, as in the Church to every member, and all to Christ, and Christ to them** (1 Cor. xii. 12).

IV. On the whole verse. **In passionate affection more will be spoken than acted.** Both women say the same thing; but yet upon more deliberation one of them calleth back her word. *Passion causes men to speak unadvisedly.* They are not themselves.

"What a pleasing sight to see relations walking hand in hand in the fear of the Lord from Moab to Canaan—from this world, doomed to destruction, to the upper regions, the seat of rest and felicity!—*Macgowan.*

"The wise and foolish virgins both take their lamps and go forth to meet the bridegroom. Thus all go together on the way to return unto the land of Judah. As far as this journey lies still within the limits of Moab, so far they may unite to go."—*Tyng.*

"At Preston, at Malines, at many such places, the lines go gently asunder: so fine is the angle, that at first the paths are almost parallel."—*Dr. J. Hamilton.*

"Many listen together to the preaching of the word of God. Many feel together the burden of personal affliction and distress. Many are made to see their danger, and to remember their responsibility to God. Many appear to feel the guilt of their past sinful life, and to be really aroused in their mind and conscience to the necessity of obtaining salvation. Anxious, excited, apparently earnest and sincere, they set out upon their journey back to the gracious Being whom they have so long neglected. Yes, they really set out, and appear to set out sincerely."—*Tyng.*

"How many of these young travellers have I seen! The Church delights over them, the pastor rejoiced in them; Christian friends were encouraged by them; the brightest and most blessed hopes clustered around them. . . . . For a season they must be allowed to go on together. Awakened, convinced, interested in religion, apparently equally determined, they set out well."—*Tyng.*

"So from the heights of will
Life's parting stream descends,
And, as a moment turns its slender rill,
Each widening torrent bends.
From the same cradle side,
From the same mother's knee,
One to long darkness and the frozen tide,
One to the peaceful sea."—*Holmes.*

"What a strange and perplexing medley this world is! and how the confusion would be increased, could we read the hearts of men aright, and distinguish the destinies shaping themselves to-day for that other and never-ending life! Here is one who by the grace of God is seeking a crown of unfading glory, yonder one who shall assuredly wear the crown of everlasting reproach; here a spirit climbing heavenwards, there one going down deliberately to the home of eternal darkness. And they dwell to-day side by side, linked by the various ties of social and family life, in the same street, in the same house, it may be, bound together in the closest bonds of love and friendship. To men the difference is but a slight one; with God the distinction is seen as the beginning of a never-ending separation."—*B.*

"Man oft resolves and re-resolves, yet dies the same. Hell is paved with good intentions."—*Luther.*

"Man is but man, unconstant still, and various;
There's no to-morrow in him like to-day.
Perhaps the atoms rolling in his brain
Make him think honestly this present hour;
The next a swarm of base, ungrateful thoughts
May mount aloft." *Dryden.*

"A variety of minerals exhibit translucency only on their edges. The central mass is dark; but, holding the specimen up to the light, light is transmitted dimly through the thin edges. Marble, flint, or hornstone are examples. These symbolize the man who has been brought so much under the influence of Christianity that it has modified his external conduct, produced some regard for true piety, led to some outward reformations, and caused him to adopt some of the forms of religion. Yet the darkness of unregeneracy reigns within. Friends, and possibly the man himself, mistake the rays that struggle through the edges of his character for genuine Christian experience."—*Hitchcock.*

VERSES 11—13.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.—**Are there yet sons?** etc. In allusion to the custom of a man raising posterity to his deceased brother by taking his widow (*Adam Clarke, Jarci, Wright, Keil*). Probably this custom obtained among other nations (*Patrick, Scott*). Known among the Gentiles before it was given to Israel (*Gill, Speaker's Com.*) (cf. Gen. xxxviii. 8, 26; Deut. xxv. 5). That law respects a brother by the father's side, and not by the mother's only (*Aben Ezra, Carpzov*). Not binding on a brother as yet unborn (*Gill, Carpzov, etc.*). Evidently, however, extended beyond the brother in the strict sense, and applied to the nearest relative, Boaz (*Speaker's Com.*) Deut. xxv. 5, probably to be understood in this wider sense. **Turn again** [return] **go** [to your own people] (*Targum*).

If I should say. Rather, suppose that I should say I have hope that I were even to be married this very night, and were even to bear children (*Bishop Horsley*). In English we might imitate the sentence thus: For (let us suppose) I say I have hope; I have a husband; I have children; will you, etc. (*Lange*). Another reference to a Levirate marriage, possibly. So Keil, Wright, etc. Not so Rosenmuller, Carpzov. (See on ver. 11.) **If I should have an husband,** etc. If I were with an husband, etc. **And should also bear sons.** Shall I yet have any more sons that I may give them to you? (Syriac.) Perhaps you think that I will marry, and that sons will be born to me (*Arabic*).

Ver. 13. **Would ye tarry.** For לָהֵן read the masculine לָהֶם (*Houbigant, Bishop Horsley*). Rather to be taken adverbially, as "therefore." "Would you therefore wait," etc. (*Maurer, Rosen., Gesen., Bertheau, Wright*). The rendering of the English version (after Sept., Vulg.), "for them" is very improbable (*Lange*). Omit "for them," and translate "under these circumstances," or briefly "then" (*Lange*). Would ye tarry on these accounts, for these reasons? (*Wordsworth.*) **Would you stay [for them** (omit)**] from having?** etc. Would you therefore shut yourself up, so as not to have an husband? (*Wright.*) עָגַן From the Chaldean, "to keep back," "to shut up" (*Wright*). Does not occur elsewhere in Hebrew. As virgins before their marriage lived in seclusion, so widows who were betrothed to children, while waiting for their coming of age, should keep themselves at home, lest any suspicion should attach to them (*Le Clerc*). And will you be hindered from being married? (*Syriac.*) Will you be kept back by them from marrying? (LXX.) **It grieveth me much.** It is much more (*Lange*), far more bitter to me than to you (*Wright, etc.*). For it has gone much more bitterly with me than with you (*Keil*). As in the Authorized Version (*Gesen., Bertheau*). It may be a trial to you to leave me, but it is a still greater trial to me to be deprived of you; but it must be done, since, etc. (*Tremellius, Junius*). The LXX. has *υπερ υμας*, not *υπερ υμων*; and so Syriac, Arabic (comp. Gen. xix. 9). You may have husbands and children, but I can never expect to have either (*Wordsworth*). **The hand of the Lord.** Generally signifies the means whereby He accomplishes His counsels (*Topsell*).

VERSES 11—13.

Theme.—THE SECOND TRIAL OF AFFECTION.

"I have lived long enough: my way of life
Is fallen into the sear, the yellow leaf;
And that which should accompany old age,
As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,
I must not look to have."—*Shakespeare.*

"Our voluntary service He requires,
Not our necessitated; such with Him
Finds no acceptance, nor can find; for how
Can hearts not free be tried whether they serve
Willing or no?"—*Milton.*

Ver. 11.—*And Naomi said, Turn again, my daughters,* **etc.**
Ver. 12.—*Turn again . . . go; for I am too old,* **etc.**
Ver. 13.—*Would ye tarry for them* [Heb. therefore,] **etc.?**

Here we see in Naomi the same non-proselytising spirit which characterizes her descendants down to the present day (*Anon.*). Scarcely so. Rather the spirit which would convince before it converts, which loves too well to persuade unwisely, which knows that a conversion made outwardly and in seeming only, is but the beginning of a future apostacy.

Note. (*a*) To decide any important question on wrong issues or false expectations is inevitably to find the ground hollow under our feet by-and-by.

(*b*) Love which deals faithfully with us in such moments is likely to prove faithful to us hereafter. It may wound, but it does so with good reasons (Prov. xxvii. 6).

(*c*) Love can say "no" sometimes, even when no means "separation."

With Naomi, *in fairness to them,* she says "return,"—but *in her affection* she calls them "daughters." She can do the latter, but she can do nothing more. They could enter into her house, but not into Israel's national life (*Lange*). This the key to what follows. In her own mind, if they go forward with her, the prospect, humanly speaking, is hopeless.

Notice. *Grief often says many really unnecessary things in order to conceal others which it dares not say* (*Lange*). When she says that there is no hope for them in herself [*i.e.*, in husbands being born them through her], she implies there will be none elsewhere in Israel. At best they could only be as widows shut up (see Crit. Notes), waiting for a husband never to be born. A dreary prospect even to Naomi. *The climax of grief shows itself in the climax of impossibilities adduced* (*Lange*).

We have—

I. A test of true love. If they go forward, (1) *They must die to their own interests.* Do not indulge romantic hopes—visionary expectation which can only end in disappointment (*Lawson*). What her sons had done in Moab was not customary in Israel (*Lange*). She loves them too much to deceive them,—would rather part with them than do this, or even allow them to deceive themselves; if they go with her, they must go forward with a similar and kindred spirit of self-denial. Note. Thoughts ripened into resolves by serious consideration are likely to be kept (*M. Henry*).

So Christ dealt with His disciples. He said, "Foxes have holes," etc. (cf. Luke ix. 23, 24, 58). So a faithful pastor will deal with young converts.

The test here plain, sincerely meant, and founded, as the issue shews, upon good reasons. Naomi's words follow, and are in agreement with the outward circumstances. We see, too, that they follow the leadings of Divine Providence. To do the one is often, and if we could rightly read the outward circumstances would always be, to do the other.

Note. (*a*) *God sometimes hedges up the path so that there is nothing before us but the strait gate of self-denial.* Especially is this true of the spiritual life. Stript of all, we enter the kingdom of God. The gate strait, the way narrow.

> "Heaven's gates are not so highly arched
> As princes' palaces. They that enter there
> Must enter on their knees."

(*b*) *To be joined to the hope of the true Israel of God, we must be ready to deny ourselves of everything else.* Esau sold his hope for a mess of pottage. So Orpah.

Again, (2) If these young women are to go forward with Naomi, *love itself must bring its own and only reward.* Not a single inducement is held out, not a single promise made. Naomi would be theirs, nothing more. It is this that sends Orpah back, but suffers Ruth to go onward. And why? Orpah saw herself, while Ruth saw only the beloved one (*Lange*). She went with Naomi, though alone, because she loved Naomi alone.

How true all this is of a real affection for Christ! In love as in life He will be the first and the last. (Comp. Matt. vi. 24, with xxiii. 10; John xxi. 15, 22.)

We love not Christ at all, unless we love Him above all (*Augustine*). Compare the Saviour's description of the stony-ground hearer (Matt. xiii. 20, 21), as seen in the conduct of the Jews (John vii. 60—66), with the words of Simon Peter on that occasion (*ib.* 67—69).

We have—

II. A test of character and motives. Free will is essential to virtue; and that free will may be fairly exercised, there must be no concealment. It must be able to sit down and count the cost. *One test is not sufficient.* Naomi's words search Orpah through and through, from many sides and in many ways. Did she desire "rest in the house of a husband"? (ver. 9.) Hitherto this may have seemed possible to her in going forward. Not so now, and she must see it! *A dreary blank hopelessness in this direction, the secret of Orpah's return to Moab.*

Of this return notice—

(1) Persuasions which fall in with our own desires are readily accepted.

(2) And that until these come we have not been truly and really tested.

(3) The strongest and purest motives are the only enduring ones.

So in Christian life. Time, and circumstances, and the unfolding of events around us, must and will come in to test the momentary decision for Christ.

Note. *This is God's ordinary and deliberate plan in dealing with men in life.*

If heaven could be won by a single struggle, by a single determination, the work would be easy. But experience does for us what Naomi did for these. The test possibly not very severe at first,—the victory on our side (cf. ver. 8—10). Sooner or later we are met by a prospect as blank on the human side as this (Luke ix. 23; Mark x. 21). What then of our better resolutions and vows?

We have here—

III. A test involving the deepest and most solemn issues. (1) *Decisive between God and Chemosh.* So Orpah understood it, for she went back "to her gods." So Ruth understood it (ver. 16).

Note. (*a*) *The human love is made the pivot on which a higher affection turns and hangs*—the human selfishness or unselfishness decisive of more lasting questions. A principle connected with this, love for the creature leading to and shewing a capacity for, love to the Creator (cf. 1 John iv. 20). More particularly must this be seen in a lasting and unselfish affection for the godly.

Note. (*b*) *We may love the image of Christ in His servants, though we have not yet understood the full meaning of our affection.* This Ruth's position. Her affections leaned in that direction, and she was ready to embrace all it involved (ver. 16, 17). Another extreme of character shrinks from all contact with Christ's disciples. A third type exists, in those who love God's people but merely on the human side. This Orpah's danger. Note. *Earthly affections are frail at best, and often mingled unconsciously with much that is selfish.* Such characters fail ignominiously in moments like these.

(2) *Decisive seemingly for time and eternity.* A choice of mere outward circumstances may involve issues which are to last throughout eternity. Opah took Moab and all that Moab implied and included; Ruth, Israel. This last test seems at first a trifling one; judge it by its results! So always in spiritual things. When we choose the lower path, what is it but that we turn our back upon a higher? *The momentary action decisive, the tendency fatal.* Christ would give to the world the kingdom of heaven, but they will have the kingdom of earth, and here they part (*Luther*).

Bernard on this—

I. That in giving counsel to or fro, it is good so to speak as may declare love and respect to the parties.

II. That it was a custom among the Jews, for parents and children to speak most commonly one to another in the nearest and dearest terms of love.

III. That it is a point of wisdom to ask ourselves, Why we will do this or that thing, before we undertake it, or resolve upon it.

IV. That the true, honest-hearted, and such as fear God, in the kind offers of their friends, deal truly with them, and will not lead them into vain hopes.

V. That worldly respects are not the motives which should induce any to join themselves with God's people.

VI. That the wise will not make promises rashly for others, nor persuade to more than they well know.

On the point of marriage, as taught here—

I. That while a woman hath hope of children she may marry.

II. The marriage is for them that are grown up for it and are marriageable.

III. That it is not good for such as intend to marry to defer off too long.

IV. That a godly and wise mother-in-law cannot only be willing, but also will persuade her children-in-law should marry again.

"Till this advice was given, the soundness and sincerity of Ruth's religion did not appear; nor did the rottenness of Orpah's profession discover itself."—*Macgowan.*

"Naomi would not willingly leave her widowed daughters-in-law in Moab. Though she apparently discourages them, it is with the manifest design that they should go with

her upon motives that should be permanent and not disappointing."—*Tyng.*

"She discharges her difficult task with infinite delicacy. They, of course, had no thought of marrying any sons that might be born to the widowed Naomi. Such a thought could not possibly have entered into their minds. Why then does Naomi lay such emphasis on the utter unlikelihood of her having sons, and of their waiting for them even if she should have them? Simply to convey to them that, if they went with her, *they would have no hope but in herself.*"—*Cox.*

"The surprising delicacy with which this is done is such as to shew clearly how truly a religious love educates and refines. The ultimate cause of the grief occasioned by the separation lies after all solely in the fact that Ruth and Orpah are Moabitesses. Naomi could not bear to tell them that if they, as daughters of Moab, went with her to Israel, they would find themselves in a less hospitable situation than they had hitherto enjoyed. She is too tender to remind these good children of the fact that Israel does not sanction connections with Moab."—*Lange.*

"Orpah and Ruth are themselves aware of all that Naomi says to them in these verses. In wishing to go with her, they cannot possibly have a thought of building hopes on sons as yet to be born to Naomi by another marriage. But—and this is what Naomi would make them feel—any other hope than this vain one, they as Moabitish women could not have in Israel. If I myself—she gives them to understand—could yet have sons, I would take you with me. My home would then be your home too. To me you are dear daughters-in-law, whether in Israel or in Moab, *but other prospects have you none.* She heaps up improbabilities in order to indicate in this veiled manner that this was nevertheless the only possible ground of hope for them in Israel."—*Lange* (condensed).

"We see these young travellers meet with many discouragements to their return. How earnestly Naomi argues with them to search what manner of spirit they were of! How kindly she presses them to go back and find their shelter and their rest among the friends they were leaving! How she presses upon their remembrance that she has nothing to offer them, no hopes, no promises to hold out of present or prospective worldly gain! How she mingles the expressions of her gratitude and her grief in order the more effectually to impress them with a conviction of the earthly poverty of her journey! Again and again she kissed them in token of farewell. Again and again they wept in protestation of their fidelity and determination. How affecting and how promising seems such an interview! Read again these pathetic verses. Did Naomi really wish to discourage them? Did she really desire them to go back? Was she willing to leave them in Moab? Did Orpah gratify her more than Ruth? Far from this. She would try their faith and affection. She would know what was in their heart. She would see how long and how truly she might trust them hereafter. And therefore she lays before them the sorrows of the journey and the barrenness of the earthly prospect."—*Tyng.*

"We cannot [but] notice here what seems an interesting fact—the thorough tolerance of Naomi. She indicates not the slightest shadow of intolerant dictation or overbearing advice, the most obnoxious form that advice can take. She recognizes in the two, when then say they will return with her, their indefeasible right, though her own children by marriage, at least to think and to decide for themselves. She felt her business was to give them clear and trustworthy information, but not to exercise even maternal influence in precipitating what they might blame her for when they came to taste the possible bitterness of her position, and to experience poverty, it might be, with the knowledge of the true and living God. She sets to us a most righteous example. Never try to coerce the judgment, or to force the conscience, even of the nearest and dearest; a victory gained at such expense is worse than a defeat. Respect the intellect, revere the conscience; say what you would like, urge what you would prefer, but leave to each individual connected with you perfect liberty to decide and act for themselves. To tempt, to coerce, or compel by fear, or by reward, or by force, is to intrude your hand into the holy place which the human conscience is, even in its aberration,—to lay a rude hand, as it were, upon the ark of God, and to assume prerogatives for yourself which God alone is exclusively competent to exercise.

"As there was to be no coercion or violence on the part of Naomi, there was on the other hand to be no concealment. There are two ways of bringing another over to what we like; we may either coerce the person, which is most criminal, or we may conceal—which is most dishonest—the actual state of things, and draw over to us unawares one who will afterwards, on discovering facts as they are, repent and regret the step. Naomi was candid. She shews them that there was no earthly prospect whatever of bettering their condition."—*Dr. Cumming.*

"I cannot think very highly of Naomi's character when I see the advice she gave to her daughters. She loved them, it is true; but her love was of too carnal a natrure; for she had more respect to their temporal welfare than to the welfare of their souls. Should not the advice of Moses to Hobab have been hers to both of them, "Come with me, and God will do you good"? (Numb. x. 29—32.) Naomi, thou hast given us a picture too often realized in the present day: in her we see a mother more anxious about the providing of husbands for her daughters than the saving of their souls."—*Simeon.*

"A Jesuit might raise the question, *is it wise* to tell the whole truth under circumstances like these? The Christian conscience is satisfied in knowing that *it cannot be sinful.*"—*B.*

Theme.—RESIGNATION IN SUFFERING.

"Oh, 'tis good
To wait submissive at Thy holy throne,
To leave petitions at Thy feet, and bear
Thy frowns and silence with a patient soul."—WATTS.

Nay, my daughters; for it grieveth me . . . . that the hand of the Lord is gone out against me.

Three widows remaining, the solemn and affecting monuments that God will not be forgotten. Here is the end of all the wanderings of the past! Naomi's sorrow, bitter as it is, intensified by the helplessness of those who have shared her calamities with her, her afflictions finding an increasing heaviness because of her unselfish desires for their welfare. [Some translate, "It is far more bitter to me than to you," or, "It has gone much more bitterly with me than with you."] God has reduced me to such mean services that I can do nothing for you (*Gill*). Note. (*a*) *To a gracious spirit it is an increase of sorrow to see others involved in the fruit of our sins.* The heaviest burden of many a parent's heart explained in this (cf. 2 Sam. xii. 15—23). Even a monarch's crown brings no exemption from the law (2 Sam. xxiv. 17). (*b*) *True love takes to heart a friend's afflictions in its own troubles* (*Bernard*). Human life, alas! shews too often the other extreme, a hardness and callousness of heart to all the expressions of Divine displeasure as they concern ourselves, and a total insensibility to the result of our sin, as it may affect others. (*c*) *Calamities like these not only bring sorrow for the dead, but grief for the living.*

Notice, **I. The source of this affliction.** Men generally see in details like these (v. 1—5) the natural and ordinary sequence of events. Naomi saw something else beyond and behind, infinitely more worthy of note. Her loss proceeded from no other by-causes, but from the hand of God (*Fuller*). As the showers come from the clouds, so her afflictions from the Lord (*Topsell*). Why doubt this, though they had stolen upon her a thousand times more naturally, gently, and insensibly, were that possible? Stoics ascribe calamities to inevitable fate; Epicureans and atheists, to blind fate; Philistines, to chance; Christians, to that One by whom the very hairs of our head are all numbered (*Macgowan*). Note. *This is one of the distinguishing marks of God's children in all ages.* Afflictions come of the Divine hand. Their measure, their continuance, their purpose, all appointed of Him "with whom we have to do."

A caution necessary here. God's people may sometimes without good reason think that the hand of the Lord is gone forth against them (*Lawson*). Job thought so when the hand of Satan had despoiled him of his substance and his children (Job i. 12, 21; ii. 6, 10). So also there is a slothful way of giving assent to Divine judgments. We say it is His hand when it is the hand of our own sloth and folly. Eli, with a resignation which would have been beautiful under other circumstances, said, "It is the hand of the Lord" (1 Sam. iii. 18). Note. *This a common phrase in the mouth of the wicked.* Under this covert we often hide our impatience as well as our sinful carelessness.

II. The spirit in which afflictions should be borne. (*a*) *With resignation.* Naomi does not complain. Seems to bow to the inevitable future. Doubtless found comfort in the fact that *it was the hand of the Lord*—that God, with whom is mercy, and not another, had wounded her heart. Note. *Every other way of receiving chastisement folly and madness* (Acts ix. 5; Isa. i. 5; Rom. ii. 4, 5). (*b*) *With candour.* She acknowledged evidently the sinful cause of all the discipline through which she has passed as in herself—"*the hand of the Lord has gone out against me.*" Otherwise the passage reads like an accusation against God. Note. *Some have even represented life in this way as a conflict with God* (cf. Job ix. 34, xiii. 21, xvi. 12—21, etc.). A terrible thought, if true, and there is a sense in which it is true of the wicked. Naomi, however, looked upon her afflictions as a

judgment for lingering in the country of Moab (*M. Henry*). (*c*) *With wise thoughtfulness.* She obeys and returns (*M. Henry*). (*d*) *With unselfish care and regret for the evil estate of others.* Grief too often hardens the heart to all other sorrow outside our own. It is not so here. Naomi's gentle unselfish spirit shines out conspicuous among the Old Testament saints. *It grieveth me much for your sakes.*

Topsell on this:—

First, that all our afflictions come from the Lord, that He might chastise His own, and confound the ungodly (Job xxxiv. and xxxvi.). Neither the godly escape, nor the wicked go scot-free (Deut. xxxi. 18). This the confession of Moses and of David, a man more exercised in trouble than all the world beside (Ps. cxix. 71).

Secondly, that the godly are so patient in all their tribulations, even from this consideration, that the Lord's hand afflicteth them (2 Sam. xvi. 10—12; Job ii. 10).

Bernard on this:—

I. The most godly sometimes take their afflictions very heavily (Job iii.; Jer. xx. 9—12).

II. Afflictions are the more grievous for friends wrapped therein, so as one cannot help another.

III. That all afflictions come by the power and providence of God—as by a hand upon us (Lam. i. 12—17; Amos iii. 6, iv. 6—11; 2 Chron. xv. 6).

IV. That the godly in common calamities take themselves to be especially chastised. This good woman applied the whole cross to herself. They think upon their own sins, and not upon other men's misdeeds.

"And if there be some things which we believe to be inflicted by the Lord, to whom can we render our patience better than to the Lord? Nay, He teacheth us to rejoice moreover, and to be glad in that we are thought worthy of Divine chastisement. *As many as I love*, saith He, *I chastise*. Oh, blessed is that servant on whose amendment the Lord is bent; with whom He deigneth to be angry; whom He deceiveth not by hiding His admonitions from him!"—*Tertullian.*

"Patience . . . adorneth the woman, approveth the man; is loved in the boy, praised in the young man, respected in the old; is beautiful in every sex, in every age. Come now, let us describe her form and her demeanour. She hath a countenance serene and placid; a forehead smooth, contracted with no wrinkle of grief or of anger, her brows evenly and cheerfully relaxed, her eyes cast down in humility, not in melancholy. Her mouth beareth the seal of honourable silence. Her colour is such as those have who are free from care and crime."—*Tertullian.*

"God Almighty in mercy makes this world unpleasing to good men by affliction, that they may set the less value upon it. This is the voice of the rod, and of Him that hath appointed it, which every wise man ought to hear and answer with all obedience, submission, and thankfulness; and when affliction hath wrought this effect, its business is in a good measure ended, and for the most part it is thereupon eased or removed."—*Hale.*

"'Oh,' saith the people, 'God hath justly sent this plague for the corruption of the magistrates.' 'It is justly inflicted,' saith the magistrate, 'for the disobedience of the people.' 'Herein,' saith the poor man, 'God hath met with the oppression and extortion of the rich. 'Herein,' saith the rich man, 'God hath paid home the muttering and the repining of the poor.' 'Now,' saith the prodigal. 'God punisheth the covetousness of old men.' 'Now,' saith the old man, 'He scourgeth the prodigality of such as be young.' Far otherwise Naomi, who, though the arrows of God did glance and rebound, to the wounding of Orpah and Ruth, yet she thought herself was the mark at which God did level His shafts. 'The hand of the Lord is gone out against me.'"—*Fuller.*

"We are never nearer to God than when we are lowest in our own estimation; and never more pleasing to Him than when we abhor ourselves, and repent in dust and ashes."—*Charles.*

"To be dejected is natural; but to be overcome by dejection is madness, and folly, and unmanly weakness. You may grieve and weep, but give not way to despondency, nor indulge in complaints. Weep as wept your master over Lazarus, observing the just limits of sorrow which it is not proper to pass.—*Chrysostom.*

"He who possesses religion finds a providence not more truly in the history of the world than in his own family history; the rainbow which hangs a glistening circle in the heights of heaven is also formed by the same sun in the dewdrop of a lowly flower."—*Jean Paul Richter.*

"Disappointments meet us at every turn; where we expected we should be particularly favoured with helps and advantages . . . . we behold ourselves left destitute; so that we have no more a place of refuge upon earth, no more a dear counsellor or friend who is as our own soul. By this means we are compelled, as Noah's dove was, by the wide watery waste which did not afford a

single resting-place, to fly to the Ark, and to take shelter there."—*Venn.*

"Be still in sorrow! As God wills!
Let that thy motto be;
Submissive 'neath His strokes receive
His image stamped on thee.
Be still in God! Who rests on Him,
Enduring peace shall know,
And with a spirit glad and free,
Through night and grief shall go."
Sturm.

"And if in our unworthiness
Thy sacrificial wine we press;
If from Thy ordeal's heated bars,
Our feet are seamed with crimson scars,
Thy will be done!
Strike, Thou the Master, we Thy keys,
The anthem of the destinies,
The minor of Thy loftier strain,
Our hearts shall breathe the old refrain,
Thy will be done!"
Whittier.

"The good we have enjoyed from Heaven's free will;
And shall we murmur to endure the ill?"
Dryden.

VERSE 14.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.—**And they lifted up their voice and wept again** "exceedingly" (*Dr. Cassel*), "still more" (*Luther*). As in E.V. (*Lange*). (See on ver. 9.) Much affected with the tender things Naomi had said (*M. Henry*) (cf. Gen. xxix. 11). **And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law** (*και επεστρεψεν εις τον λαον αυτης*), [and returned to her own people] (LXX.). So Vulgate, Arabic, Syriac. Unquestionably found in their MSS (*Bp. Horsley*). So Dathe, Houbig, Booth. Not so Wright. Lange supplies, "and turned back." As it stands, the sentence seems incomplete. Buxtorf contends, however, that the return is implied in the act of kissing. Naomi's kiss (ver. 9) evidently meant "return," and so Orpah's may be understood to say "farewell." The last sad kiss of a tearful separation (*Steele* and *Terry*).

But Ruth clave unto her, followed her (LXX.), stayed by her (*Luther*). Her person was, as it were, glued unto Naomi, as the force of the Hebrew words is (*Bernard*). In Psalm lxiii., the same word is rendered "followeth hard." No fresh demonstration of affection, but she *clave*, etc., not merely because of a tender affection for her mother-in-law, but also a yearning desire to know more of the God and land of Israel (*Steele* and *Terry*). The conversion of Ruth probably commenced at this time (*A. Clarke*). She had been a proselyte before (*Rambachius, Aben Ezra*). **Ruth** (see Intro., par. 4, 5; and Crit. and Exeg. Notes on ver. 4). In his genealogy of our Lord, St. Matthew inscribes the name of only four women—Thamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba [literally only three are mentioned by name, and these three are foreigners (*Kitto*), Bathsheba being designated as "her of Urias"]; and among these four, Ruth easily holds the pre-eminence (*Cox*). Thamar, Rahab, and Bathsheba, were all women of dubious virtue (*Cox*). Ruth is, in some respects, one of the most interesting female characters of the Bible (*Kitto*).

Theme.—THE CRISIS AND THE CONTRAST ONCE AGAIN.

"'Twixt two worlds, like a star, life shines;
A little star with fading light;
Above, o'erbending day; beneath,
The deep abyss of endless night.
* * * * *
And who shall hymn its praise aright,
If it enfold eternal bliss?
What notes express the funeral dirge,
If it the future crowning miss?"—*B.*

And they lifted up their voice and wept again; and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clave unto her.

Insensibility in certain circumstances is not fortitude; it is savageness and stupidity, or something worse (*Toller*). Their tears here their ornament and their honour. Both wept again (cf. ver. 9); alike in the signs of their affection, not so in the actions which follow. Probably Orpah's grief was the more demonstrative (ver. 10), especially so now. Note. (*a*) *That all outward sorrow gireth not certain witness of the soundness of the heart* (*Bernard*). Saul's weeping to David (1 Sam. xxiv. 16). Ishmael, the son of Nethaniah, in his tears a deep dissembler (Jer. xli. 6—8). (*b*) *The difference between mere kindness of manner and self-sacrificing love most vividly depicted here* (*Speaker's Com.*).

"And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law,"—the customary salutation in saying farewell. Previously Naomi had kissed Orpah (ver. 9). They parted possibly without a word. Too much overcome to speak, the natural and usual sign of affection comes in to say that which words cannot.

> "Oh! when the heart is full; when bitter thoughts
> Come crowding thickly up for utterance,
> . . . The poor, common words of courtesy
> Are such a very mockery."—*Willis.*

Note. (*a*) *An evidence here that affection survives a difference of opinion* (*Dr. Cumming*). Separation, even on the most vital points of religion, does not necessarily mean alienation of heart; just as distance, either in time or space, does not necessarily affect true love. The adoption of a false religion must not deaden affection, or break up the courtesies of social intercourse (*Dr. Cumming*). (*b*) *Farewell may be spoken and received, even when we think it spoken unwisely, without anger.* No dispute here, no bitter feeling in the mind of either. (*c*) *Second remonstrances may succeed where previously our entreaties and persuasion have met with apparent failure.* This is true whether for good or for evil.

We have here again (cf. on ver. 10)—

I. A marked and strong contrast. Orpah going back in tears, perhaps in despair (cf. Matt. xix. 22); Ruth going forward in resolute self-sacrifice, though from the human side without hope; the one to the pleasures and delights of the past; the other, true to the little light already given, onward to a better future.

(1) *Points to an underlying though unseen difference in character and faith.* Orpah preferred the sensuous to the spiritual; Ruth, the unseen to all she knew as lying behind her in Moab (cf. ver. 16, 17). Orpah sought rest in the "house of a husband;" Ruth, rest with the Israel of God. Orpah could not easily understand the force of a great moral or intellectual obligation (*Cumming*); Ruth determined to follow love wherever it might lead her. In Orpah we have nature in its most hopeful aspect; in Ruth we begin to see the dawnings of grace. Note. *Where and how a child of sense differs from a child of the Spirit.* (*α*) In the want of steadfastness. (*β*) In clinging to self after all in the decisive moments of life. (*γ*) In love of the world behind when the final hour of choice has come. (Cf. on ver. 10, div. II.)

(2) *Suggests a very common contrast between natural gifts and grace.* The one makes a man, the other a Christian. Orpah's religion was passion; Ruth's, principle. Orpah's illustrates mere profession; Ruth's, decision for God. *Orpah the type* of the beautiful, affectionate, fair, but frail ones of this world. Much that is good, only the touch of the defiler is there. *Ruth the representative* of the noble, enduring, and self-sacrificing spirit God only can bestow.

We have here—

II. A final separation. Brought about by natural causes, but involving spiritual and even eternal issues. (See on ver. 11—13, div. III.; also p. 57.) *Onward with Naomi means Godward*, and so heavenward. Like Abraham, Ruth becomes through her fidelity "heir of the promises," and ancestress of a long line of kings, ending in the Shiloh that was to come. *What does backward mean?* And yet all depends upon the choice of the moment. *A painful but inevitable crisis* (*Tyng*). They have dwelt together, suffered together, journeyed side by side. Yet now they must separate, and here they have come to the decisive point. Their paths lie apart. For the future, their aims, direction, the issues of their lives, wide as the poles asunder.

Note. (*a*) *A time like this in the soul's history.* The sinner comes to a point where he must either go forward and confess, or backward and deny, the hope which is in Christ Jesus. He stands, like Orpah, irresolute, deciding now for and now against. But sooner or later the irrevocable decision comes, and all the future hangs upon *that.*

(*b*) *A time like this in the history of all human friendships.* A separation as certain, and as final; if not before, then in that great day when the sheep are divided from the goats (Matt. xxv. 32). (1) *Often brought about by religious influences* in this world. The Ruths go forward to new and holier companionships; the Orpahs back again to the sinful associations of Moab. (2) *Sometimes by outward circumstances,* the exigencies of human life, and the providential leadings of God.

"There is no union here of hearts
That finds not here an end."

IMPROVEMENT.—Learn (1) the necessity for an instant and wise decision in these critical moments; (2) That the plausible choice, like Orpah's, is not always the wise one; (3) That all connexions, all enjoyments, all worldly pursuits, should give place, as with Ruth, to the sweet and endearing influences which draw us towards God.

Fuller on this (condensed):—

These words contain two general parts; (1) A blazing meteor falling down out of the air; (2) A fixed star fairly shining in the heaven.

That thou mayest finally persevere observe these four rules—

I. Utterly renounce all sufficiency in thyself. Who but a madman will nowadays warrant the paper shields of his own strength, that knows that Adam's complete armour of original integrity was shot through in Paradise?

II. Place all thy confidence on the undeserved mercy of God. Perseverance cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor as yet from the south; but God suffereth one to fall, and holdeth up another. The temple of Solomon had two pillars; one called Jacin ("The Lord will stablish"), the other Boaz ("In Him is strength"). So every Christian—the temple of the Holy Ghost—is principally holden up by these two pillars, God's power and will to support him. Wherefore in every distress let us cry out to God, as the disciples did to our Saviour in the midst of a tempest, "Help, Master, or else we perish!"

III. Use all those means which God hath chalked out for the increase of grace in thee; as prayer, meditation, reverent receiving the sacraments, accompanying with God's children, reading, hearing the word, etc.

IV. Always preserve in thyself an awful fear lest thou shouldest fall away from God. Fear to fall, and assurance to stand, are two sisters; and though Cain said he was not his "brother's keeper," sure I am that this fear doth watch and guard her sister assurance. *Faulus est gradus certitudinis, quantus sollicitudinis:* they that have much of this fear have much certainty; they that have little, little certainty; they that have none, have none at all. It is said in building, that those chimneys which shake most and give way to the wind will stand the longest: the moral in divinity is true; those Christians that shiver for fear by sins to fall away may be observed most courageous to persist in piety.

IMPROVEMENT.—Let us therefore "work out our salvation with fear and trembling:" ever trembling, lest we should be cast to hell; ever triumphing that we shall come to heaven: ever fearful, lest we should fall; ever certain that we shall stand: ever careful, lest we should be damned; ever cheerful that we shall be saved.

"Look at that sad group of three tearful widowed women standing in the highway debating this question, Shall we say farewell or not? Is it not a scene for any painter? No, not for *any* painter, but for one whose soul can sympathise with womanly grief, and whose hand has skill enough to portray that pathetic mingling of sorrow and love. How

he would sketch the varied expressions in those faces! Naomi with eyes full of eager entreaty, and lips quivering with pain; Orpah moved to weeping, yet perplexed, wondering what decision to make, and casting a glance ever and anon back on the road they have come; Ruth standing, grasping her mother's hand with unwavering resolve in every line of her face and attitude. It is a sacred moment, an hour of suspense, on which depends a future that no prophet's eye hath discerned."—*Braden.*

"We have [here] a very striking and instructive instance of the distinction between mere amiableness of natural temper and religious principle. Forming your opinion of them from the whole of the former part of the history, you see nothing to choose between them. Both of them appear to great advantage, most amiable and well-disposed young women; excellent wives, and kind and affectionate daughters-in-law. But when put to the test, you see the difference. Orpah appears to have had every natural excellence that Ruth possessed, but it was not grafted on religious principles. Ruth was not only as amiable as her sister-in-law, but knowledge of the true God appears to have reached her heart. . . . The one was a lovely heathen, the other what we should call in this day an amiable Christian. . . . Orpah was like the young man whom Jesus loved for his amiable qualities, but who went away sorrowful; Ruth was like Mary, who chose the better part, that could not be taken away from her."—*T. N. Toller.*

"It might be said with a certain degree of truth, that the same cause induced Orpah to go, and Ruth to remain—the fact, namely, that Naomi had no longer either son or husband. The one wished to become a wife again, the other to remain a daughter. Few among the natural children of men are as kind and good as Orpah; but a love like that of Ruth has scarcely entered the thoughts of poets. Antigone dies for the love of her brother; but the life which awaits Ruth was more painful than death. Alcestis sacrifices herself for her husband, and Signne persistently continues in a solitary cell, with the corpse of her lover whom she had driven into battle, until she dies; but Ruth goes to a foreign land, and chooses poverty, not for a husband or a lover, but for the mother of him who long since was torn away from her. She refuses to leave her for the very reason that she is poor, old, and childless. Naomi, having lost her sons, shall not on that account lose her daughters also. Rather than leave her to suffer alone, Ruth will starve with her or beg for her. Here is love for the dead and the living, surpassing that of Alcestis and Signne. That Ruth does for her mother-in-law, what as the highest filial love the poet invents for Antigone, when he represents her as not leaving her blind father, is in actual life almost unexampled. Nor would it be easy to find an instance of a deeper conflict than that which love had to sustain on this occasion. The foundation of it was laid when Elimelech left his people in order not to share their woes. It was rendered inevitable when, against the law of Israel, his sons took wives of the daughters of Moab. It broke out when the men died. Their love for their Israelitish husbands had made the women strangers in their native land; and the love of Naomi for her Moabitish daughters made her doubly childless in Israel. Nationality, laws, and customs were about to separate mother and daughter-in-law. But *as love had united them, so also love alone has power to solve the conflict*, but only such a love as Ruth's. Orpah escaped the struggle by returning to Moab; Ruth ends it by going with Naomi."—*Lange.*

"Longing for knowledge,
Thirsting for truth,
Loving fair virtue,
Saying like Ruth,
'I will go with thee,
Thine shall be mine;'
Friendships it may chance
Leaving behind;

New worlds shall open,
Bright with a sheen,
Decked with a glory,
Eyes have not seen;
Clearer the sunshine,
Lighter the shade,
Daily and hourly
O'er life's way made.

True to thine own self,
True to thy God,
Treading the pathway
Good men have trod;
All the past for thee
Worketh amain,
All the past in thee
Liveth again;

All that is worthy,
All that is true,
In thy right deed
Liveth anew;
And unborn blessings
Springing from thine,
Gladden the morrow,
Make it divine."—*B.*

"Nature in its highest endowments and improvements is infinitely below grace. There are some believers in Christ whose natural tempers are never refined to such a degree as we might expect from their religious principles; yet they shall dwell for ever in the regions of love. There are other men whose natural tempers are affectionate and humane. Perhaps they are improved by all the advantages of a polite and learned education. Thus they acquire an uncommon degree of respectability in the world, and yet continue destitute of faith in Christ and love to God. With all their attainments they are still in a miserable condition. The love and esteem of men will not secure them from the wrath of that God whose service they neglect, and whose Son, the only Saviour, they despise."—*Lawson.*

"Like Martha and Mary of New Testament history, Orpah and Ruth represent two different types of character. Orpah's home attachments, and desire to find rest in another husband's house, control and limit her life influence and action. Ruth's loftier spirit discerns in the God of Israel the fountain of a purer religion than the Moabitish idolatry affords, and she gladly forsakes father and mother, and sister, and native land, to identify herself in any way with the people of Jehovah."—*Steele and Terry.*

"Some habits and practices of godly men may be easily counterfeited. Yet I think that there are certain virtues of God's children which are perfectly inimitable. To bear 'reproach for Christ,' and to suffer wrong patiently, is to my mind very much like 'the root' in practical godliness. . . . See there a young man who has risked losing his situation because he will not conceal his attachment to Christ. Such as these are sometimes brought into great straits. They do not see any precept that plainly says, 'Thou shalt do this,' or 'Thou shalt do that.' But they find they must do one thing or the other. They make their choice, and it is against their worldly interest, but it is done for the love they bear to a Saviour's name. Little faith takes a strong grip. Oh! I cannot doubt the root of the matter is found in them."—*Spurgeon.*

Theme.—THE FAILURE OF A MERELY EARTHLY AFFECTION.

"Oh heart of ours! so weak and poor,
That nothing there can long endure;
And so their hurts find shameful cure,—
While every sadder, wiser thought,
Each holier aim which sorrow brought,
Fades quite away, and comes to nought."—*Trench.*

"Thy soul shall have her earthy freight,
And custom lie upon thee with a weight,
Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life."—*Wordsworth.*

And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law [and went back to her own people, LXX.].

A little entreaty will serve to move nature to be good unto itself (*Bishop Hall*). So with Orpah. No other persuasions have been used but worldly reasons taken from marriage. She that even now, for the love of people and mother-in-law, would go as far as the farthest, for the cogitation of a heathen husband forsaketh both God and people and mother and sister (*Topsell*). Alas for human nature, for here is the type! Men follow the higher and nobler instincts of the heart for awhile; but how often is it that afterwards inducements of worldly prosperity or comfort come in to turn them aside, and to lead them back to the world! And alas, too, for the fickleness of our best resolutions (cf. ver. 10), if unaided by Divine grace!

See here, then—

I. An instance of instability and inconstancy. Orpah a reed shaken with the wind (*Braden*). (1) *She must have been untrue to her convictions.* Men do not go so far as this towards the true Israel, without seeing enough to encourage them in still going forward. We may pity, but pity must not warp the judgment. We may even excuse in some measure. But the true reason of such "returns" found in the apostle's words, "They went out from us," etc. (1 John ii. 19). (2) *She certainly was untrue to her affections.* And untrue to the lower love, how could she be true to the higher hope of Israel? (cf. 1 John iv. 21.) Seeking the things that were her own, she left behind her the things that were Christ's (Phil. ii. 21).

Note with such—(*a*) *A change of mind evidently underlies this outward change of purpose.* Man in himself fickle as the wind, especially in those things which concern his best welfare. "Ye *did* run well," etc. (Gal. v. 7)—a common and necessary exhortation always.

Note. (*b*) *The necessity for a decision is the signal for a retrograde movement* (*M. Timson*). They begin to go backward precisely as they begin to understand what is really involved in going forward. So with those who followed Christ (John vi. 60—66). When they heard that discipleship meant faith in Him (*ib.* 63), and a Divine power working in themselves (*ib.* 65), they stumbled at the saying, and "walked no more with Him." They "went back," as Orpah did. Such

minds will go a certain length in positive duty, and yet always draw back from a really decisive act (*M. Timson*).

Note. (*c*) *In some feeble way there will be an exhibition of actual love for the course which is nevertheless renounced* (*M. Timson*). Orpah wept, and Judas bitterly repented. The vision of things divine haunts them even as they return into the darkness they have chosen (*M. Timson*). And inspiration sends after them the solemn words of warning, "If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him" (Heb. x. 38). Notice then the perilous position of those who stand in the critical moments of life—on the boundary-line of God's Israel, and yet with love to the Moab behind hidden in the heart. *Orpah the type of a mind half awakened to the things of God* (*M. Timson*).

See here—

II. An illustration of apostacy. Orpah neither cold nor hot, like the Laodicean church (*Macgowan*). Puts her hand to the plough, but looks back again; and such are unworthy the kingdom of heaven. Like Judas with Christ, she is loving enough to kiss, but not to cleave to Naomi.

Notice as significant—*This going back* (1) her own choice, (2) deliberately made, (3) respectfully expressed, (4) freely and finally carried out (1 John iv. 21).

So with many to-day. They forsake the world apparently; join themselves to God's people; travel towards the heavenly Jerusalem; seemingly profit in religion, but they have no stability, "no root in themselves," as the gospel expresses it (Matt. xiii. 21). Easy Christianity, half-hearted Christianity, external Christianity apostatizes, and well it may! Without vital change, men return to the world, to their old state and ways (Heb. iii. 12). They return speedily, and as certainly as Orpah went back to Moab (John vi. 66). And this in the face of all their protestations (ver. 10).

Note. (*a*) *Professions are like bills; you judge their worth by the names they bear, the firms by which they are issued* (*Braden*). (*b*) *What is soon ripe is soon rotten* (*M. Henry*).

See here—

III. An illustration of the causes and consequences of apostacy. (1) *The causes.* With Orpah the reasons for this return to be found (*a*) *in her inclinations.* Hence she is easily persuaded to yield to these. She prefers her pagan connections, after all, to the privileges of the house of Israel. Puts her country, her kindred, and her god [Chemosh] before all else. Eve lost Paradise for an apple, and the Gadarenes will lose Christ rather than their swine (*Bernard*). Such is man's choice naturally. A warp in the nature, a proneness to meaner things. (*b*) *In her supposed interests.* She went as far as consisted with her hope of carnal enjoyment (*Macgowan*). But when the prospect of a husband in Israel was for ever put aside (ver. 12, 13), then she returned to Moab, where there still might be hope (ver. 8, 9). Note. *An inability to deny herself the key to this "going back."* Orpah like many now, who are almost but not altogether Christians. They follow Christ to a great length, but cannot *forsake all* for Him; are willing to part with much, but not with everything; go as far with Him as costs no pain and calls for no complete self-denial, but stumble at a daily "cross-bearing," and that following Him through good and evil report which He demands (cf. Luke xiv. 26; James iv. 4; 1 John ii. 15, etc.). (*c*) *In the threatened inconveniences.* Orpah a type of those who have a sensitive hatred to suffering (*Braden*).

(2) *Its consequences. She "goes back,"* and the separation becomes wider every hour. So an awakened and convinced mind can never abide at the line where a Saviour is refused (*Tyng*). No permanency in that state. *She goes back to her own people.* So apostates return to the old companionships and associations of the past; to the haunts of dissipation and delight (2 Pet. ii. 22); to the folly and frivolity of the past (2 Tim. iv. 10); to covetousness and ever-increasing greed (2 Pet. ii. 15, 16); to unbelief and hardness of heart (2 Tim. ii. 17); to open hostility and hatred of the truth (*ibid.*). *She goes back to her god.* Chemosh

preferred to Jehovah—a being without existence, having eyes and yet seeing not (Isa. xliv.), to the Lord of heaven and earth. Note. *Apostates begin in the spirit, but end in the flesh* (*Lawson*). How true the apostle's words of such, "The latter end is worse with them than the beginning" (2 Pet. ii. 20).

LESSONS.—(1) We are not easily to entertain men as sincere, because they have made a fair show in religion for a time (*Bernard*). (2) An amiable temper or an affectionate behaviour will not compensate for perseverance in the heavenward calling. Being almost a Christian never conducted any man to heaven (*Macgowan*). (3) Those who at first were forward in religion, may afterwards altogether fall away (*Fuller*). Asa possibly an illustration of this (2 Chron. xiv. 10—12). Note. Many leave Christ with a kiss, who would shrink from betraying Him as Judas did.

Price on this (condensed):—

Theme.—ORPAH, OR THE MERE PROFESSOR.

An onlooker not able to discover the difference between Orpah and Ruth so far. Begins to appear now. The crisis has come. Both had made professions (ver. 10). Here the difference is made apparent.

I. We learn that it is possible to go a long way towards Christianity, and yet not to be a Christian. To be born, educated, and dwell in Christian households, these are great blessings, but do not constitute or make a Christian. It will not do to be almost, we must be altogether, decided for Christ. The cup that is almost sound will not hold water. The ship that is almost whole will not weather the storm. To be almost a son is to be a bastard. To be almost a Christian is to be almost saved, and to be almost saved is to be altogether damned. Nothing will save us short of being in Christ. Feelings, sentiment, profession, are all good *if* they spring from a living faith in Jesus Christ; without this they are worse than worthless.

II. We learn that it is possible to deceive ourselves, and to think that all is right, when in truth all is wrong with our souls. Hardly possible that Orpah played the conscious hypocrite. She meant what she did when she became a proselyte—did not deliberately act a part. Feeling and sentiment [love for her husband] blinded her eyes. Now that which looked like *principle* proves itself *passion*. Discovers that she had deceived herself. Love to God, which she had thought supreme in her heart, subordinate to the love of Moab.

This often so with men; they are *not hypocrites*, they are self-deceivers. Education, circumstances, the force of influences around them, produced an emotional religion which they mistake for vital godliness. They hear with joy like the "stony-ground hearers." We do such an injustice, if when we see them going back we point the finger of scorn, and cry "hypocrite."

III. We learn that our religion will not profit us at all unless it be characterized by perseverance to the end. Orpah stands with Jehu, Judas, Demas, Hymenæus, Alexander, and Philetus—Beacon lights! Their word to us is this, "Beware!" No grace, however bright and precious, will take us to heaven without perseverance. Language cannot adequately set forth the misery of the man who apostatizes. The latter end of that man is worse than the beginning (2 Pet. ii. 20—22). Conscience becomes hardened, etc.

IMPROVEMENT.—Is our profession a mere profession or the fruit of a living faith? Brought by circumstances to the boundary-line between life and death, have we stopped there? The Bible full of such instances. Felix trembled; Balaam prophesied; Herod heard gladly; Judas sat at the sacramental table with our Lord! Whatever we do, we must not stop short of conversion; if we do, we perish. We must not be content with a mere outward reformation; we must seek that radical and entire change in the soul, of which the Holy Spirit is the author.

Bernard on this—

I. It is easy to make signs of love, but not to shew the true fruits of love.

II. Worldly respects are great hindrances in the course of godliness.

III. An unsound heart may for a time make a fair show in the way to Canaan, but yet turn back at the last.

IV. Such as want soundness towards God for religion, may yet have otherwise commendable parts in them.

"In the first half-awakened state of the mind, and before Christ has been seen in the vision of a true faith, to go away, or to cut oneself off from the human teacher and friend, is to cease from the spiritual good already attained. It may be that Orpah did not realize this at the time, or that she was but partially conscious of it; yet it was present, and the mightiest element in the question upon which she was called to decide. She was not the first, nor the last, who, in forsaking a friend, forsook also a true teacher and guide—one whose love would have been the guarantee of the quality of the higher influence exerted."—*M. Timson.*

"Is this she which even now was so promising in her words, and so passionate in her weeping? See how soon a forward professor may turn to a fearful apostate. Though she standeth or falleth to her own Master, yet, as the Psalmist saith, 'I am horribly afraid for those that forsake Thy law.' so have we just cause to suspect the fearful final estate of Orpah."—*Fuller.*

"Orpah had left her heart in Moab, with its follies, its frivolities, its amusements, its dissipations, its sights, festivals, and *fêtes;* its idol temples, shrines, and altars. Her heart was so full of these, that she could not detach it from them; and therefore she returned to her gods, her people, and her country."—*Dr. Cumming.*

"The bright morning does not always shine unto the perfect day; the sweetest spring-bud of promise does not always ripen into precious fruit. The seed that was cast on stony ground grew rapidly up, but withered in a moment. Orpah's decision was the decision of impulsive feeling, of filial affection; it was strong suddenly, it grew up in an instant, and in an instant it perished."—*Dr. Cumming.*

"On second thoughts her enthusiasm cooled down. I daresay she said within herself, 'It was not enthusiasm—it was simply fanaticism, and I have now come to a better mind.' One would gather from the conduct of Orpah that she had feelings, not very deep affections, strongly rooted in her nature; pure passions, but not yet consolidated into fixed principles; resolutions that had no anchorage in her heart, no hold of her inmost and her deepest nature. She was vacillating, impulsive, very likely sentimental; her tears and smiles followed each other in rapid transition. She was easily swayed; the victim of feeling and momentary impulse; repenting at her leisure what she had accepted in a hurry."—*Dr. Cumming.*

"If the soul be not changed, though there may for awhile some religious colour appear in the man's face, he will at last return to his former habit."—(*Spiritual Bee*) *Penn?*

"I have sometimes seen a blazing comet much outshining other stars, and attracting the eyes of men to behold with wonder, which yet by its decay and vanishing awhile after hath appeared to have no true place among the stars, but in the lower region."—(*Spiritual Bee*) *Penn?*

"Gifts, affections without Christ . . . . They are the fair flowers and perfumes which only make more terrible the death-pyre."—*Wadsworth.*

"Men said to-day of one who sinned, 'What may
This mean? What sudden madness overtook
His brain, that in a moment he forsook
The rectitude which until yesterday
Had made his life a beacon by the way
To common men?' I answered, 'We but look
On surfaces. Temptation never shook
One soul whose secret hidden forces lay
Firm centred in the right. The glacier bides
For ages white and still, and seems a part
Of the eternal Alps. But at its heart,
Each hour, some atom noiseless jars, and slides,
Until the avalanche falls with thundering weight.
God only knoweth the beginning's date.'"
Helen Hunt.

"They fall deepest into hell who fall backwards into hell."—*Bunyan.*

"Καταφιλειν ουχ εστι φιλειν, saith Philo. Apostates betray Christ with a kiss, temporaries forsake Him, and embrace this present world."—*Trapp.*

"Faith is the champion of grace; but what is it worth if it faint and fail? Love is the nurse of grace; but what will it avail if it decline and wax cold? Humility is the adorner and beautifier of grace; but what will it profit if it continue not unto the end?"—*A Puritan Divine.*

"As the worst travelling is when the road is frozen after a thaw, so those are frequently the most hardened who have had some convictions, who have had some knowledge of the Gospel, and some religious affection, and have then relapsed into their natural hardheartedness."—*Arrowsmith.*

"Every one is rather a Naomi to his own soul, to persuade it to stay still, and enjoy

the delights of Moab, rather than to hazard our entertainment in Bethlehem. Will religion allow me this wild liberty of my actions, this loose mirth, these carnal pleasures?"—*Bishop Hall.*

"His heart he cannot, will not, give to Christ. Anything else he will do. But nothing else will avail him anything. He will be baptized. But baptism cannot save him. He will be confirmed. But that is not salvation. He will come to the table of the Lord. But there is no salvation for him there. He will fast and pray. He will toil and labour in his own self-righteous plans. He will try to cleanse the outside of the cup and platter, and resolve to work religious works. But all this is not salvation. And here he must separate from the people of God, though they have travelled long together. They must go on, *and he will not.*"—*Tyng.*

"You have seen a ship out on the bay, swinging with the tide, and seeming as if it would follow it; and yet it cannot, for down beneath the water it is anchored. So many a soul sways towards heaven, but cannot ascend thither, because it is anchored to some secret sin."—*Beecher.*

"The soul's birthright is not cast away by a momentary weakness or folly,—one act such as this before us may decide the woful transaction, but a hundred minor actions and thousands of thoughts of wrong have gone before it to make it possible. . . . Temptation, when it comes upon a man well-grounded, leaves him as the wave leaves the rock over which it has rolled; but when principles are already undermined, a trivial temptation, a single wave, is often enough to complete the ruin."—*H. Wonnacott.*

Theme.—THE CONSTANCY OF A DIVINELY-KINDLED LOVE.

"True friends, like ivy and the wall it props,
Both stand together, or together fall."—*Dic. of Poetic Illustrations.*

"Without a murmur I dismiss
My former dreams of earthly bliss;
My joy, my consolation this,
Each hour to cling to Thee."—*Mrs. Elliot.*

But Ruth clave to her.

The Scriptures are seminally brief (*Lynch*). A phrase here expresses a love and heroism which has seldom been equalled and never excelled in human history. "Ruth *clave* to her." The force of the Hebrew word is to be knit as man and wife inseparably (*Bernard*) [cf. Gen. ii. 24; Matt. xix. 5, where the word is used in this connection]. So Onesiphorus clung the more closely and tenderly to Paul, when Phygellus and Hermogenes, with all who were in Asia, turned from him in the hour of his distress (2 Tim. i. 15, 16).

Note. (*a*) *The heart has reasons which the reason does not comprehend* (*Pascal*). Who can explain, much less justify at the time, a sublime and self-sacrificing choice like Ruth's? All outward appearances are against it,—the choice would not be heroic were it otherwise.

(*b*) *But a deathless love such as this has always in the end proved its own vindication.* So when the soul cleaves to Christ, it is influenced by motives which the understanding but imperfectly estimates, and which the carnal mind fails altogether to comprehend. The Saviour Himself offers the true explanation, that "wisdom is justified of her children" (Matt. xi. 19). Yet in this is the real test as to whether we walk by faith or by sight. If you would believe, you must crucify that question, "Why?" (*Luther*).

(*c*) *Every theory which fails to appreciate that man is a spiritual being, influenced in other ways than mere external ones, must inevitably misread and misinterpret human life.* If this life is all, what profit in self-denial, what promptings towards virtue, that can seriously command our attention for a moment? On the sceptical theory, Ruth's choice a mere impulse, and not even her after-success and prosperity can redeem it from the charge of folly. And yet what heart fails to estimate the incomparable superiority of Ruth to Orpah? The heroic in history, that which men have admired and loved in all ages, that which has made human progress possible, and left a halo of glory around the past, is mirrored here. That which is best in human fiction finds its counterpart; that which is noblest in life, its

image and semblance. And all is explained and accounted for if we see in Ruth one chosen out of a far country, and from among a strange people, that she might become an Israelite indeed—one yielding to the Divine impulses, and listening to the Divine voice, though unable as yet to interpret its full meaning. "Forget also thine own people and thy father's house; so shall the king greatly desire thy beauty; for He is thy Lord: and worship thou Him" (Ps. xlv. 10—13).

We have here—

I. The choice of true love. Orpah's stone of stumbling and self-denial seen as a jewel flashing with heaven's own light to Ruth. Naomi so precious in her person and influences as to be clung to, be the consequences what they may. The choice a kindred one to that of Moses in its faith and self-sacrifice. (Choosing rather to suffer affliction, etc., Heb. xi. 25.) Can we be far wrong in seeing in both the same underlying religious convictions, as coming in to decide the choice? If so, it is a mistake to say that love for Naomi *merely* led her to become a Jewish proselyte. Note. (*d*) *Love may be spiritual and God-given, and yet perfectly natural in its way of development.*

Notice of this choice, (1) *That it was not that of impulse, but of conviction.* Nothing can shake her resolution. The love that has brought her so far with Naomi kept her steadfast now, and to an affection like hers decision becomes more and more easy. Note. (*a*) *Affections are the great deciding influences in life.* Hence Paul says, "Set your affections," etc. (Col. iii. 2). And (*b*) *The supreme affection is the great central power in human life.* Everything else responds as by a law of gravitation to that. Hence, if it be toward Moab and the world, as with Orpah, everything around us will lead us backward; if it be towards the hope of Israel and God, onward and forward as with Ruth.

(2) *That it was not the influence of mere sentiment or excitement.* The choice made with a full determining to abide by it, come weal or come woe, for ever (*Price*). She had counted the cost. Probably, as a Moabitess, she might have to bear cold looks and harsh treatment (*Price*). Significant that she was called afterwards *Ruth the Moabitess* (cf. ii. 2, 12, etc.), the designation of an alien and one outside the covenant. Note. *Steadfastness essential to the formation and manifestation of a religious character* (*Toller*). Piety must be such as to stand the test of time.

(3) *That it was not biased by any selfish hope.* The same gloomy prospect before her which had deterred Orpah from going forward. But like that one who cried out "so much the more" because of discouragements, Ruth clave to Naomi the more steadfastly, in spite of threatened affliction and seeming opposition. Seems to say, "Be the sacrifice ever so great, I am ready to make it; I shall delight in making it" (*Simeon*). Note. (*a*) *A true and steadfast convert to Israel follows very naturally in one who has stood such a testing of the natural affections.* (*b*) *The portion of Israel and of Christ not a barren choice, though it may look so for the present.* Such are to receive "a hundredfold" (Matt. xix. 29). The promise literally fulfilled in the case of Ruth.

We have here—

II. An instance of more than filial piety. Almost as marvellous in what it leaves as in what it clings to. She realizes, doubtless, a keen sense of her mother-in-law's forlorn condition; but only the more vividly to become conscious of Naomi's worth and her own duty. Her natural affections are to be seen as an open door leading towards faith and God. Note. (*a*) *The next degree unto godliness is the love of goodness* (*Bishop Hall*). He is in a fair way to grace, that can value it (*ibid.*). (*b*) *There are circumstances in which we are called to stand to certain people in the place of God* (*Braden*). Parents have to do so to their children. They have to learn of us before they can learn of Him (*ibid.*).

See here (1) *The expulsive power of a new affection.* Transforms her whole nature, changes the tenor of her whole life. Love is a marvellous magician (*Braden*). Note. (*a*) *It is not what we take up, but what we give up, which makes us*

rich (*Beecher*). Only with renunciation life, properly speaking, can be said to begin (*Carlyle*). Mark, too, (*b*) *The higher good can only be gained by the sacrifice of the lower* (*M. Timson*).

See here then (2) *A sacrifice almost unequalled in its severity.* The old nature against her, the force of habit, and all the early associations of the past. Yet love triumphs over all. Put to the trying alternative, either to forsake her mother-in-law and the hope of Israel, or all that was behind her in Moab, she does not hesitate for a moment. The religious aspect of the question comes in here. This alone could justify her leaving her own mother for a comparative stranger. Remember what Moab was, and in this higher aspect Ruth's choice is completely vindicated.

III. An illustration of the entire surrender of ourselves to God. We have a final separation from Moab, and a complete devotion to Naomi. So David clave to the sanctuary (Ps. xxvii. 4). So Paul to Christ (Phil. iii. 7—9), and to the way of salvation. "This one thing I do," he said (*ibid.* 13).

See what a real determination for God and religion is (cf. 16). It does not consist in rash promises, in hasty resolutions, in transient feelings, however strong, but in what the Scriptures call "a full purpose of heart to cleave unto the Lord," *a fixedness of soul upon matured conviction* (*Toller*). To this Barnabas exhorted the Christians at Antioch (Acts xi. 23). Note. (*a*) *To know Christ truly is to need Him eternally.* Whoever has tasted Him can never again live without Him (*Lange*). No going back to the "beggarly elements of the world" *then!* (*b*) *Only those who are cleansed by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost will cleave to Christ and His believing Church in the dark and clouded day of adversity* (*Macgowan*).

IMPROVEMENT.—(1) Away with all mere affection which kisses, but does not cleave to Christ! Clinging to Him is the only test of true love (John xv.). All else counterfeit,—this the only conclusive sign that we are His. (2) See too the necessity for decision. To make a beginning in the right direction is a great thing (*Beecher*). (3) Learn also the power of resolution; it silences temptation. Those that go in religious ways without a steadfast mind stand like a door half open, which mocks a thief; but resolution shuts and bolts the door (*Miniature Com.*).

"Blessed is Ruth, who so clave to her aged mother-in-law that she would not leave her until death. For this reason, Scripture indeed has justly extolled her; but God has beatified her for ever. But He will judge, and in the resurrection condemn, all those wicked and ungodly daughters-in-law who deal out abuse and wrong to their parents-in-law, unmindful of the fact that they gave life and sustenance to their husbands. . . . If therefore thou lovest thy husband, O wife, then love them also who gave him being, and thus brought up a son for themselves and a husband for thee. Seek not to divide the son from his father or mother, lest thou fall into the condemnation of the Lord, in the day of awful inquest and judgment."—*Origen.*

"Neither self-interest, nor hope, nor vanity mix themselves up with this love. It is a purely moral and spiritual love, of which no other instance is on record. It is in fact the love of those whom God by His mercy has won for Himself, and who love God in their brethren. It is the evangelical love of the apostles, who loved Greeks and Franks, Persians and Sythians, as their own flesh and blood. Such love as this followed the steps of our Lord, and tarried where He was. Confession, martyrdom, prayer, and every brotherly thought or deed, spring from the love of the converted heart."—*Lange.*

"Love is above all, and when it prevails in us all, we shall all be lovely, and in love with God, and one with another."—*Penn.*

"Lead men through love to love. For love cultivates and preserves the true and the good by doctrine, life, prayer, watchfulness, and by a thousand other inventions of its inexhaustible genius."—*Sailer* (*quoted in Lange*).

"If moral virtue could be seen with mortal eyes, it would attract all hearts to it."—*Plato.*

"A spiritual relationship is never so close and so strong as when the persons are related also by *strong natural sympathies.* . . . Now and then it has happened that this harmony has been so strangely complete, that each has loved the other literally as his own soul, and felt indeed as though there were but one soul between them. The fact is, that the one spirit enters into and affects similar natures so similarly, that when either speaks out of his deepest life, he equally speaks the experience of the other. When these similars

by nature are apprehended by the Second Adam, and the sweet life of eternity springs up in their hearts, the relation becomes one of unutterable endearment. . . . Every step of their spiritual progress relates them more and more essentially."—*John Pulsford.*

"'Twixt that, long fled, which gave us light,
And that which soon shall end in night,
There is a point no eye shall see,
But on it hangs eternity.
This is that moment—who can tell
Whether it leads to heaven or hell?
This is that moment—as we choose,
The immortal soul we save or lose.
Time past and time to come are not;
Time present is our only lot:
O God! henceforth our hearts incline
To seek no other love than Thine."
J. Montgomery.

"Think not too meanly of thy low estate;
Thou hast a choice; to choose is to create!
Remember whose the sacred lips that tell,
Angels approve thee when thy choice is well." *O. W. Holmes.*

"A few forsake the throng, with lifted eyes,
Ask wealth of heaven, and gain the real prize—
Truth, wisdom, grace, and peace, like that above,
Sealed with His signet, whom they serve and love." *Anon.*

"Blest with this followship divine.
Take what Thou wilt, I'll ne'er repine;
E'en as the branches to the vine,
My soul would cling to Thee.

Far from her home, fatigued, oppressed,
Here she has found her place of rest;
An exile still, yet not unblessed,
While she can cling to Thee."
Mrs. Elliot.

"A few years ago, and you were not; a few more, and on this stage of life you will be no more. Much has been done, much is yet to be done in the interval. You are now at the outset of womanhood. Woman's duties, woman's strange and mixed destiny of suffering, feeling, and deep life, is beginning."—*Robertson.*

"They say that when the temperature has gone down below the freezing-point, water will remain apparently the same, and yet that it will congeal at a touch and in a moment. So with the changes and transitions in human character and life. They go on silently and invisibly, until some crisis in outward circumstances brings them suddenly to maturity."—*B.*

"Thus it is that in some decisive moment every soul that attains salvation makes its choice, by which it adopts the true Jehovah as its portion. It abandons all the former idolatries of its life, and becomes a true worshipper of the true God."—*Steel and Terry.*

"So a soul that is truly brought to Christ affectionately loves Him and heartily cleaves to Him, resolves in the strength of Divine grace to follow Him whithersoever He goes or directs, and is desirous of having communion with none but Him."—*Gill.*

"Ruth's attachment was worth ten thousand of Orpah's kisses. The young nobleman in the Gospel treated our Lord with high respect; but all this availed him nothing, for he would not sell his possessions at Christ's command, and become a follower of Jesus. Happy were the apostles who continued with Him in all His temptations. They left all, and followed Him. What they left was little; but that love which disposed them to leave all was highly valued by Him, and they received a hundredfold of recompence even in this world."—*Lawson.*

"The story of Ruth has shed a peaceful light over what else would be the accursed race of Moab. We strain our gaze to know something of the long line of the purple hills of Moab, which form the background at once of the history and of the geography of Palestine. It is a satisfaction to feel that there is one tender association which unites them with the familiar history and scenery of Judea—that from their recesses, across the deep gulf which separates the two regions, came the Gentile ancestress of David and the Messiah."—*Stanley.*

"Ruth is a prophecy, than which none could be more beautiful and engaging, of the entrance of the heathen world into the kingdom of God. She comes forth out of Moab, an idolatrous people, full of wantonness and sin, and is herself so tender and pure. In a land where dissolute sensuality formed one of the elements of idol worship, a woman appears as wife and daughter, chaste as the rose of spring, and unsurpassed in these relations by any other character in Holy Writ. Without living in Israel, she is first elevated, then won, by the life of Israel, as displayed in a foreign land. Amid surrounding enmity and jealousy toward Israel, she is capable of being formed and attracted through love."—*Lange.*

"What can you do, but faithfully and simply follow Him who has said, 'Whosoever loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me'? You must go forth with Ruth, and leave those who, rejecting Jesus, will not go with you. You must follow the Lord fully, though you follow Him alone among your earthly connexions."—*Tyng.*

VERSE 15.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.—**And she** [Naomi] **said, Behold thy sister-in-law,** *i.e.*, wife of a husband's brother; no English word exactly answering to the original Hebrew. The same word is rendered brother's wife (Deut. xxv. 7, 9), being the feminine of that ren-

dered (*ib.* 7) husband's brother (*Speaker's Com.*). **Unto her gods** [god]. "And to her god" (*Luther's Bible*). The singular is to be preferred (*Lange*). Adam Clarke thinks that both Orpah and Ruth had been idolaters so far. With Ruth, however, a leaning towards the God of Israel and His laws (*Keil*). Wright argues from these words that Naomi viewed idolatry without serious disfavour, at least as practised by others. This held upon insufficient data. Naomi's words do not necessarily contain any recognition of the Moabitish deity, or indicate (as Wright suggests) that she was possibly led astray by the false idea that Jehovah was only the God of Israel (*Lange*). Was Jephthah then (Judges xi. 24, 27) similarly led astray? (*Lange.*)

Return thou. Serious in her intentions, sincere in her advice (*Keil*). Perhaps said merely to prove Ruth's constancy (*Speaker's Com.*). (Cf. Josh. xxiv. 15—19; 2 Kings ii. 2—6). Spoken that it might be made clear whether she would adhere steadfastly to the God of Israel (*Seb. Schmidt*). Not that she desired her to return, but to try her sincerity (*Gill*). She had simply the earthly prosperity of her mother-in-law in her mind (*Keil, Carpzov*).

Theme.—THE THIRD AND LAST TRIAL OF AFFECTION.

"What though the world unfaithful prove,
And earthly friends and joys remove?
With sure and certain hope of love,
Still would I cling to thee."—*Mrs. Elliot.*

And she [Naomi] *said, Behold thy sister-in-law is gone back. . . . Return thou,* etc.

How sad is the history of a return to Moab (*Tyng*), both in its effects and in its influences! With Orpah, to go back to her people was to return to her gods. And yet how pregnant with meaning! Evident now that Orpah had mistaken a mere momentary feeling (cf. ver. 10) for something deeper and more lasting. Evident, too, that Naomi's suspicions and surmises were correct. Note. (*a*) *The "return" justifies the tests* (ver. 8, 9; 11—13). Very naturally, also, it leads to this final trial of Ruth's affection and steadfastness. Naomi anxious still; fears lest even now cleaving to her should be the result of a rash, unthinking choice; dreads a future apostate in a present convert. Could not really intend to persuade her beloved daughter to return to the service of Chemosh (*Lawson*). Said of those of whom the world was not worthy, "they were tempted" (Heb. xi. 37). So here. Note. (*b*) *The trial is by no means intended to justify the "return."* In the present case, disobedience a virtue (*Macgowan*). When Christ said to Judas, "What thou doest do quickly," He by no means authorised Judas to execute his wicked designs (*Lawson*). Orpah doubtless went back to Naomi's grief (*Lawson*).

I. See where the strength of this last trial lay. *An unfavourable example lends its weight to worldly disadvantages* (*M. Timson*). These heavy enough before; now Ruth is to see one she loves turning away from Naomi, and lending her influence to lead her backwards. Orpah has "gone back," too, although she cherished as warm an affection for Naomi as any a mother-in-law could expect. Note. (*a*) *Example has a mighty influence*, especially the example of those who are dear to us. Christ felt it to be so in that moment when the last link between Himself and His half-hearted followers was severed, and He turned to the rest with the question, Will ye *also* go away? (John vii. 67.) A scriptural doctrine, that because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold (Matt. xxiv. 12). Note. (*b*) The castle seems almost won where one-half the soldiers are overcome (*Lawson*). Orpah has yielded, and yet for all this Ruth stands steadfast.

II. See in what lies its meaning and purpose. It evidently settled the questions at issue once and for ever. *Decision comes as the result of conflict.* Distrust of one's own judgment the most terrible spectre to fight (*M. Timson*). Especially so when the example of those we respect is adverse to our decisions. This mastered, however, the rest is easy.

LESSONS. (1) The falls of some may justly bring others into trial (*Bernard*). (2) Not the length or fury of the conflict which is important, but its results. (3) The folly of apostacy must not damp but rather invigorate our zeal.

Fuller on this (condensed) :—

Examples of others set before our eyes are very potent and prevalent arguments to make us follow and imitate them, whether they be good examples—so the forwardness of the Corinthians to relieve the Jews provoked many—or whether they be bad—so the dissembling of Peter at Antioch drew Barnabas and others into the same fault. But those examples, of all others, are most forcible with us which are set by such who are near to us by kindred, or gracious with us in friendship, or great over us in power.

USE [Lesson] I. Let men in eminent places, as magistrates, ministers, fathers, masters, and the like (seeing that others love to dance after their pipe, to sing after their tune, to tread after their track), endeavour to propound themselves patterns of piety and religion to those that be under them.

II. When we see any good example propounded unto us, let us strive with all possible speed to imitate it. . . . Follow not the adultery of David, but follow the chastity of Joseph; follow not the dissembling of Peter, but follow the sincerity of Nathanael; follow not the testiness of Jonah, but follow the meekness of Moses; follow not the apostacy of Orpah, but follow the perseverance of Ruth.

III. When any bad example is presented unto us, let us decline and detest it, though the men be never so many or so dear to us. Imitate Micaiah (1 Kings xxii.). . . . Yea, but one may say, "What if I find in the Scripture an action recorded whose doer is known to have been a godly and gracious man, may I not, without any further doubt or scruple, follow the same?" . . . The Holy Spirit hath not set these sins down with an intent they should be followed; but first to show the frailty of His dearest saints when He leaves them to themselves; as also to comfort us when we fall into grievous sins, when we see that as heinous offences of God's servants stand upon the record in the Scriptures.

"Oh, Orpah, Orpah! that thou hadst been wise, at least in this thy day, to think of the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hidden from thy eyes. . . . And could we know her history, we should doubtless find in it many a sorrowful and weeping hour as she thought of these friends of her youth whom she was to see no more. . . . It is the history we have seen in the child of the world over and over again. You may renounce the Saviour, and walk with Him no more. You may go back to Moab, and bury yourself in its sins and follies. But you will find no peace or happiness there. Your conscience will never again allow you to rest."—*Tyng.*

"Worldliness is not living in the world, possessing the world, using the world; worldliness is pursuing the world which is, to the forgetfulness and exclusion of that which is to come; it is a sacrificing of the future to the present, the enjoying of earth's mess of pottage at the loss of the heavenly birthright."—*H. Wonnacott.*

"Where the heart is indeed influenced by sovereign grace, and drawn by the eternal Father, opposition will only serve to inflame our love and zeal, as oil cast into the fire serves only to increase its ardour instead of extinguishing the flame."—*Macgowan.*

"Still Naomi proves the spirit of Ruth. 'Your sister has gone back to her people and her gods. If you mean ever to go back, now is your best time to go. Think well of what you give up, and of what you may encounter in accompanying me. Much as I would love to have you to go with me, I do not wish you hereafter to feel disappointed or grieved on my account. Remember, I have nothing to offer you. If you go with me, it must be as a partner of my griefs and wants.' Thus God often proves the young disciple with new trials. He sends the east wind upon the young trees of His planting, not to weaken or destroy, but to give greater strength and endurance for the time to come."—*Tyng.*

"Adam was soon drawn by Eve; Rehoboam's heart was easily led after the advice of his familiars; the women of Judah by their husbands easily fell to idolatry."—*Bernard.*

"This is Naomi's last trial of Ruth: and these words show plainly all was to try her, because she telleth Ruth of Orpah's going back, not only to her people, but also to her gods, which Naomi, a good woman, could not but hate, and could not so ill respect Ruth, and show so great coldness in religion and honour of the true God, as to dissuade Ruth from the same God of truth to return unto idols."—*Bernard.*

"The Saviour Himself cared not so much to be followed by the crowd, as to be served and loved by the few. Let the promiscuous multitude be gone, so that the handful left prove faithful and worthy! And even these He tries again and again. Strong enough to deny Himself of every faint-hearted and faithless disciple, and yet tender enough to weep after every such denial and desertion, it is so He speaks those pregnant and searching words of His to every one of us, Will ye *also* go away?"—*B.*

VERSES 16—18.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.—**Entreat me not**—Urge me not (*Lange*), Force me not (*Wordsworth*), Be not against me (*Trem. Junius, Montan. Bernard, Fuller, Wright; Vulg., Wycliffe, and Douay Ver.*). **Thy people shall be** [is] **my people.** I will be a Jewess both in country and religion (*Wright*). This appears to be a form of compact and union, as we may infer from Zoheir's speech in Antar (vol. iii. 98): "If you engage, we will engage; if you fight, we will fight; if you die, we will die; yours is our property, and yours is all we possess" (*Kitto*). **Where thou lodgest,** abidest (*Lange*), stayest (*Keil*).

Ver. 17. **The Lord** [Jehovah] **do so.** The Eternal do so to me, and more also (*Benisch*, a Jewish translator, who invariably renders the word "Eternal.") **And more also,** Lit. And so may He add to do (*Keil*). This form of imprecation is frequent in the books of Samuel and Kings [cf. 1 Sam. iii. 17; 2 Sam. iii. 9; 1 Kings ii. 23; etc.] When the imprecation is followed by the thing which the speaker affirms shall happen, the affirmation is preceded, as here, by the particle כִּי that (*Speaker's Com.*) So Adam Clarke, Lange. כִּי is not if (*Lange*). Answers to ὅτι in the sense of *quod*, introducing a declaration (*Keil*). The E. V. might be corrected by leaving the particle untranslated, and rendering "Only death shall part thee and me (*Lange*). Death alone shall part thee and me (*Benisch*). So the LXX., I swear that death, and nothing else than death, shall separate us (*Keil*). I swear, or some such expression, is understood (*Lange*). The first occurrence of that common formula of an oath, by which the person swearing called down upon himself a stroke of Divine judgment in case he kept not his word nor carried out his resolutions (*Steele and Terry*). The Hebrew, instead of invoking a definite judgment or calamity on himself, in case he should break his oath, simply says אִם, which with the addition "and more also," is perhaps more awful to the imagination because it is not definite (*Lange*).

There is an antiphonal character in these words, which gives it almost the character of a musical chant: perhaps it was often on the lips of maidens of Israel (*Wordsworth*): comp. Ps. xlv. 10, "Hearken, O daughter," etc., and the rhythmical movement in Rom. viii. 35, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" etc. (*ibid*).

"And Ruth said, 'Entreat me not to leave thee and return from following after thee, for I desire to become a proselyte.' Said Naomi, 'We are commanded to observe the Sabbath and good days in not travelling more than two thousand cubits.' Said Ruth, 'To every place where thou goest I will go.' Said Naomi, 'We are commanded not to lodge with the Gentiles.' Said Ruth, 'Wheresoever thou lodgest, I will lodge.' Said Naomi, 'We are commanded to keep six hundred and thirteen precepts.' Said Ruth, 'What thy people keep, I will keep, as if they were my people from of old until now.' Said Naomi, 'We are commanded not to worship with a strange worship.' Said Ruth, 'Thy God shall Himself be my God.' Said Naomi, 'We have four kinds of capital punishment for criminals: stoning, burning, beheading, and hanging.' Said Ruth, 'In whatever way thou diest, I will die.' Said Naomi, 'We have a house of burial.' Said Ruth, 'And there will I be buried'" (*Chaldee Paraphrast*). So the Jewish expositors after the Targum (*Lange*).

Verse 18. **When** [and when] **That she was steadfastly minded.** Firmly resolved (*Lange, Wright*) that she strengthened herself (*Wordsworth*) with an oath (*Bernard, Fuller*). The verb means "to stiffen oneself firmly upon a thing" (*Keil, Braden*). ***She left speaking unto her.*** Ceased to dissuade her (*Lange, Cox*).

VERSES 16, 17.

Theme.—SACRED MOMENTS AND SOLEMN VOWS.

> 'Love's holy flame for ever burneth;
> From heaven it came, to heaven returneth:
> Too oft on earth a troubled guest,
> At times deceived, at times opprest,
> It here is tried and purified;
> But hath in heaven its perfect rest;
> It soweth here in toil and care,
> But the harvest-time of love is there."—*Southey.*

And Ruth said, Entreat me not [be not against me] ***to leave thee, etc.***

Where thou diest, etc.

Ruth's famous reply to Naomi's dissuasive entreaties takes high rank among the sentences which the world will not willingly let die (*Cox*). Hard to say which is the more admirable,—Naomi in putting from her her sole comfort and

stay, or Ruth, in leaving all that she had to become the stay and comfort of Naomi's declining years (*ibid*). *God has chosen to confer singular honours upon women throughout the sacred Scriptures* (*Kitto*). As examples, Miriam, Deborah, Huldah, Anna, Mary, Lydia, and Dorcas may be mentioned. Ruth stands pre-eminent among them for the strength of her affections, and these have been the glory of woman always. Did ever the love of the human heart find a richer, sweeter expression than this? In the whole realm of literature where can they be equalled? They are absolutely matchless (*Braden*). The words become rhythmical and musical with the burden of love,—a love which solves all difficulties, and removes all obstacles. There are moments in life when the Godlike within us flashes forth, when we prove ourselves children of immortality; for we can face the ills of time, and look beyond them. Such a moment is this in the history of Ruth.

We have here, **I. The utterance of a pure, passionate, and personal affection** —pure, because unselfish; passionate, because intensely in earnest; and personal, for love naturally centres in a person [see on ver. 14, p. 60]. She sacrificed all the pleasures, all the friendships of her youth; all the hopes of better days in her own country, and she chooses banishment here, for Naomi's sake, as John for Christ's (Rev. i. 9). Note (*a*) *The Saviour demands a kindred sacrifice* of His disciples (Luke xiv. 33). (*b*) *The Christian's Patmos his way to Paradise* (Secker). "Now I begin to be a disciple," said Ignatius on his way to martyrdom. "I weigh neither visible nor invisible things, so that I may gain Christ. (*c*) *Adversity alike the test of sincerity and discipleship* [cf. Luke xxi. 16, 17; vi. 22].

Some translate, "Be not against me," [that is, in urging me to leave thee.] Ruth evidently was greatly distressed and moved by what Naomi had just said. To a heart like hers the mere thought of separation was unbearable. *See here then a mind fully persuaded.* She weighs neither pains nor penalties, and obstacles only make the decision more plain, as the refining fire serves to make the purity of the gold more apparent. Note (*a*) *They are against us who use reasons, and exhort us to turn back from well-doing* (Bernard). Christ called Peter "Satan," that is, adversary, when he gave Him counsel to do otherwise than His Father had appointed (*ibid*). (*b*) *The godly have a desire not to be hindered in a good course.* So it was with David when he had determined to meet Goliath. So Elisha, repeatedly urged, refused to leave Elijah. So Paul in his resolve to go onward to Jerusalem (Acts xxi. 13, 14). And so it must be always with the man of God. A holy boldness characterizes him; for the kingdom of heaven is to suffer violence, etc. (Matt. xi. 12).

We have here, then, **II. The expression of a choice made once and for ever.** Not a wish merely, but a strong, deliberate purpose, formed amid much apparent opposition, and expressed with an impassioned invocation on the name of Jehovah. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. Opposition only makes her the more steadfast; she strengthened herself with an oath [see Crit. and Exeg. Notes on ver. 18]. "God do so to me," etc. The choice full [complete, whole-hearted], unlimited, affectionate, determined, final (*Belfrage*). No reserve, no conditions. Her creed not an election of the heart only, or a preference of the intellect, but a practical adoption (*Cumming*).

Notice of this choice, (1) *That it was a choice made in youth.* "I bless Thee, O God!" said Beza in his will, "for many things, but especially that I gave myself up to Thee at the early age of sixteen." Ruth probably older than this, though there can be little doubt she came to Bethlehem early in life. [Boaz, when he first meets her, asks, "Whose damsel is this?" and calls her daughter, ii. 5—8.] Life opening before her, the future untried, so she gives herself to the God of Israel, and comes to take shelter under His wing. To the young, life is yet fresh and new—in their hands it is plastic and pliable. They have the experiment of living yet to begin, and they are interested as none beside can be, in learning how to begin it well (*Binney*). Note. *Early piety is likely to be eminent piety.* Why

should not the powers of nature, in their first bloom and glory, adorn the kingdom of grace? (*Dr. Watts.*)

Notice, (2) *That it was a choice made for life and death.* Made in a moment, but made for all the future. See in it therefore, not only the expression of the old love for Naomi, but of the new hope and the new life dawning within the heart of Ruth. They have been together in Moab, in darkness, bondage, and misery, why should they not be together in the land of promise? How beautiful when companionship outside the covenant of Israel ends and even leads to companionship within the fold of Christ! Mark of this choice, (*a*) *It is to control all her actions*, her goings and abidings. "Where thou goest," etc. She takes Naomi for better or worse, for richer or poorer—makes no exception to any condition which may arise. So men must give themselves to Christ, as the disciples followed the Saviour. They were content with such lodgings as their Lord had for Himself (*Macgowan*).

Again, (*b*) *It is to influence all her hopes.* "Thy people shall be my people," etc. Religion creates a firmer kinship than nature. Grace in the heart overleaps such petty boundaries as nationality. "Hereby," says the inspired divine, "do we know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." Henceforward their hope is our hope, their lot our lot in time and in eternity.

So always. To us, to-day, there are two lands and two people. When we give ourselves to the Lord, we give ourselves to His people also. The love of Christ constrains us in this as in every other way. David's delight was not in one saint, but in "the saints;" and they that love one godly person for godliness' sake cannot but affect all the Lord's flock (*Bernard*). Mark, the Christian is no recluse, the Church is not a nunnery. "Thy people;" it is companionship, society, the general assembly of the church of the firstborn (*Cumming*).

Once more, (*c*) *It is to last as long as life itself.* Ruth thinks only of the future as it is joined to Naomi's, and in this she is the true type of the Christian convert. Death alone shall divide them; for death must divide all earthly friendships, at least, for awhile. "Where thou diest," etc. How strong the affinity which holds out for life, stronger still that which is for life and death! Nay, more, she is willing to take the risk of dying first, and she will not so much as have her body taken back to Moab. "There will I be buried," etc. Love alone strong as life itself, unquenchable and unchangeable, dare speak in language like this. And yet this is the only language Christ will listen to if we are to be His disciples. We are to hate father and mother for His sake; and if we love our own life, we shall lose it in loving Him. We take Him for life and for death, and the grave is not to separate us. Blessed compensation! To die the death of the righteous, to be buried with them, is to sleep in Jesus, to be with Christ, which is far better.

(3) *That it was a choice made for God and eternity.* Her nominal profession changed into an abiding principle (*Braden*). The climax here, "Thy God shall be my God." This confession the key-stone of her vow (*Lange*). Not merely chosen because He was Naomi's God (*Lawson*). No! And yet love to Naomi was the human spark kindling an altar flame to burn before God throughout the eternities. Mysterious truth, that we may be instruments of grace to our fellow-men! Friendship may lead upward to the love of God! Note, of this choice, in the last place, that (*d*) *It is to decide the great question of her destiny.* It places her within the Israel of God. It links her with the promises coming down from Abraham's time and Adam's. So it is "the seed of the woman," *this woman*, is to bruise the serpent's head. Happy choice! earnest of that day when men shall lay hold of the skirt of Him that is an Israelite indeed, saying, We will go with you; *for we have heard that God is with you* (Zech. viii. 23).

IMPROVEMENT.—(1) The most painful part of religion comes first: God has provided "some better thing" further on (*Morlais Jones*). Poverty and misery awaited Ruth at first. (2) Self-denial is the only way to share the Israelite's hope. (3) With the truly earnest spirit, spiritual affections will always have the victory over carnal per-

suasions. (4) The love of goodness in men should lead to, and show itself finally in, the love of God Himself, the supreme good. "Thy God shall be my God," the language of every truly believing heart to the Church of Christ. A natural man may choose deliverance from hell, but no man doth ever choose God and Christ, and the spiritual benefits Christ hath purchased, and the happiness of God's people, till he is converted (*President Edwards*).

Tyng on this (condensed):—

Theme.—THE CHOICE OF YOUTH.

Ruth's faithful choice remains a permanent and everlasting pattern to all who hear the gospel in their youth.

I. **It was an humble choice**: nothing to offer but herself; no claim to present; fears she may be a burden and unwelcome. So when the Holy Spirit brings the soul to Jesus, she comes as a beggar. But in all her conscious unworthiness she chooses Christ as her portion and her Lord.

II. **It was an affectionate choice**: personal, tender. Can leave Moab without regret; can part with earthly friends, but she cannot leave Naomi. (Entreat, etc.) To such a choice the Saviour would lead us; not one of duty merely, or obligation, of fear or necessity. Not the mere remedy and recourse of disappointment and weariness; not the constrained denial of self, of appetite, and loved indulgence; not an involuntary, sorrowful relinquishment of a world that was loved as long as it bloomed, and has been forsaken only because it has faded. No. The world was never brighter. It is the perception of something infinitely more precious, the choice of the Saviour, etc. As freely as the falling drop mingles with the current, does the affectionate heart embrace and resolve to go with Him.

III. **It was an entire choice**—no hesitation. The contrasting claims of Moab were nothing. She made the exchange—the transfer of herself—freely, completely, and without reserve. So the true convert makes a complete surrender of herself to the Lord. Like Saul, "What wilt Thou have me to do?" None but Christ the language of her youthful heart.

IV. **It was a determined choice**: amazing dignity and firmness in her stand. Useless all attempts to lead her back to Moab. So in the history of early martyrdoms for Christ. "I am a Christian," the gentle but firm reply to every solicitation to recant. An open, sincere, and determined choice of Christ leads us into a harbour of rest. So Paul: "None of these things move me" (Acts xx. 24).

V. **It was an instant choice.** Asked no time for consideration. She staggered not in unbelief, nor wavered amidst conflicting motives.

When Ruth's faithful choice was thus made, she was allowed to go on her way in peace. The young convert's sincerity was proved. There she stood, acknowledged, honoured, and accepted, as a chosen traveller for Immanuel's land.

McCheyne on this:—

We should cleave to our converted friends. Follow those who follow Christ.

I. Their God is a precious God; sin pardoning, faithful.

II. Their people are a happy people.

III. They want you to go with them.

IV. If you do not go, there will be an eternal separation between you. How strange that two trees should grow so near—one to flower in Paradise, the other to be a firebrand in hell. Can you bear the thought of such a separation?

Ferris on this:—

I. A beautiful illustration of the influence of true affection.

II. An illustration of the character and feelings of the true convert.

III. One of the richest sources of parental joy.

IV. An encouragement to pious example and effort.

Cox on this:—

Three points should be noted. (1) That in these words Ruth meets every

dissuasive plea of Naomi. Naomi had no home, no asylum to offer; and Ruth replies, "Where thou lodgest, I will lodge." Naomi reminds her that she is going among an alien people, who worship another God; and Ruth replies, "Thy people shall be my people." Naomi urges that there will be no brightness, no *life* in her life; and Ruth replies that she is content to die, so that she may share Naomi's grave. (2) That Ruth adopts Naomi's God, as yet, purely from love of Naomi. And (3) that she shows how instantly and entirely she adopts Naomi's religion by sealing her vow with her Hebrew oath, and by calling on the God of the Hebrews, "Jehovah do so to me, and more also," etc.

"Her vow has stamped itself on the very heart of the world; and that not because of the beauty of its form simply, though even in our English version it sounds like a sweet and noble music, but because it expresses in a worthy form, and once for all, the utter devotion of a genuine and self-conquering love. It is the spirit which informs and breathes through these melodious words that makes them so precious to us, and that also renders it impossible to utter any fitting comment on them. They shine most purely in their own light."—*Cox.*

"Love is a giant—it heapeth mountains upon mountains, and thinks the pile but little; it is a mighty mystery, for it changes bitter into sweet; it calls death life, and life death: and it makes pain less painful than enjoyment."—*Spurgeon.*

"Love here is surrounded by the other graces, and divides the honours with them; but they will have felt the warp of night and of darkness when it will shine luminous against the sky of eternity."—*Brecher.*

"Love is a marvellous magician. Let the soul but feel its mighty touch, and you dare not prophesy the results. Men and women, commonplace enough in the ordinary affairs of life, become poets and heroes under the influence of its mysterious inspirations. The slowest tongue grows eloquent, timidity loses its fear, and is brave for all duty and sacrifice, and even death looks not terrible to the clear eyes of love."—*Braden.*

"Love does not aim simply at the conscious good of the beloved object; it is not satisfied without perfect loyalty of heart; it aims at its own completeness."—*George Eliot.*

"The love of Thee flows just as much
As that of ebbing self subsides;
Our hearts (their scantiness is such)
Bear not the conflict of two rival tides."
Madame Guyon.

"Of all that human was or is,
Alone unchanging is Thy love,
Thy love to us, and ours to Thee,
Responsive turns to heaven above.

True as the needle to the pole,
True as the branches to the vine:
Oh blessed hope! if kept by Thee,
Amid these changes we are Thine."
B.

"After a little, when a man has fairly committed himself to a Christian life, many of those things which have been against him turn round, and are like winds in his sails to help him. The great thing is to begin—to begin honestly, to begin with the help of Christ and God—*to begin.* For this is one of those cases in which to begin is half the journey. And where a man is willing to say to his companion, or to some friend or Christian brother, 'The time past suffices in which I have lived a worldly life, and I am going, by the grace of God, to begin to lay the foundations of a Christian life,' in many and many cases the crisis is past. You may not have joy to-day, nor for weeks; but you are on the way toward it. It may not be conversion; but will stand ultimately connected with it. . . . When Peter was in prison, and he was aroused by an angel in the night, that touched his chains, and caused them to fall off, when first he opened his eyes, and beheld the angel, his rescue had begun. His rescue had begun before his chains fell, before the prison-door was thrown back, before he passed the keeper."—*Beecher.*

"To follow Naomi was not simply to go with one whose piety was deep and true, and whose ability to teach the doctrines of a diviner faith might be measured by her character and her personal affection, but to go into a land of piety, where the service of God was publicly celebrated; where instruction might be received in the Divine law, and where everything around would tell of the worship of Jehovah. Who that has thought at all of the subtle influence of daily surroundings, or attempted to measure the effects of a moral atmosphere, that may be peculiar to the age in which he lives, does not know what this would mean?"—*M. Timson.*

"I would not even ask a Hindoo to give up the religion that he has, so great is the sacrifice, unless I could supersede it by a more comforting, a more glorious religion, the religion of light and liberty, and life and truth."—*Dr. Cumming.*

"The humble, meek, merciful, just, pious, and devout souls, are everywhere of one religion; and when death has taken off the mask, they will know one another, though the diverse liveries they wear here make them strangers."—*Penn.*

"Our vows are cruel to ourselves, if they demand nothing but gentle zephyrs, and flowery fields, and calm repose, as the lot of our life; for these pleasant things often prove the most dangerous enemies to our nobler and dearer life."—*Leighton.*

"Making thus the Lord my choice,
I have nothing more to choose,
But to listen to Thy voice,
And my will in Thine to lose:
Thus whatever may betide,
I shall safe and happy be;
Still content and satisfied,
Having all in having Thee."

"Some men will follow Christ on certain conditions;—if He will not lead them through rough roads—if He will not enjoin them any painful tasks—if the sun and wind do not annoy them—if He will remit a part of His plan and order. But the true Christian, who has the spirit of Jesus, will say, as Ruth said to Naomi, 'Whither thou goest, I will go,' whatever difficulties and dangers may be in the way."

"The upright in heart are like Ruth: whatsoever becometh of the gospel, they will be sharers with it in the same condition; be it affliction, or be it prosperity; be it comfort, or be it sorrow; be it fair weather, or be it foul; be it light, or be it darkness; they will take their lot with it."—*Caryl.*

"See here the large extent of a saint's love; it lasts till death: and no wonder; for it is not founded upon honour, beauty, or wealth, or any other sinister respect in the party beloved, which is subject to age or mutability, but only on the grace and piety in him; which foundation, because it always lasteth, that love which is built upon it is also perpetual."—*Fuller.*

"Carnal affections cannot prevail over spiritual convictions. The sinner who is in earnest for salvation will be deaf to invitations to go back. The more he is solicited by them, the faster he will flee from them."—*Mason's Notes on the Pilgrim's Progress.*

"A good companion, saith the Latin proverb, is *pro viatico;* I may add also, *pro diversorio.* Ruth, so be it she may enjoy Naomi's gracious company, will be content with any lodging, though happily it may be no better than Jacob had. And yet we see how some had been discouraged even from the company of our Saviour, for fear of hard lodging. Witness the scribe, to whom our Saviour said, 'The foxes have their holes,' etc."—*Fuller.*

"It has not in any age been common for the greatest of saints to have the softest beds and most comfortable lodgings; and yet, in every age, God has had His followers and witnesses, and the Church her unfeigned lovers."—*Maggowan.*

"When those that we have formerly been conversant with are turning to God and to His people, their example ought to influence us. Their example should be looked upon as a call from God, to do as they have done. God, when He changes the heart of one, calls upon another, especially does He loudly call on those that have been their friends and acquaintances. We have been influenced by their example in evil, and shall we cease to follow them when they make the wisest choice that ever they made, and do the best thing that ever they did?"—*President Edwards.*

"In our narrative, the confession of Ruth, 'Thy God is my God,' is the highest stage of that devotion which she yields to Naomi for life. She has vowed that nothing shall separate her love from its object; for whatever could separate it would make it imperfect. But since the God of Israel is the true ground of all the love which she felt for her Israelitish friends, it follows that her confession of Him is the keystone of her vow. It is at the same time the true solution of the conflict into which persons who mutually loved each other had fallen. It rectifies the error committed by her husband when he took the Moabitish woman, notwithstanding her relation to the idol of Moab. The unity of the Spirit has been attained, which not only shows true love, but even in memory reconciles what was amiss in the past. For Naomi's grief was so great, not only because she had lost her sons, but also because the daughters-in-law which she had must be given up, and she be left alone. And as love enforced the separation, so love also became the cord drawing to a yet closer union. If Naomi believed herself fallen out of the favour of God on Moab's account, she could derive comfort from Ruth, who for her sake entered into the people of God."—*Lange.*

"She was unchangeably resolved. So was that martyr who said, 'The heavens will sooner fall than I will forsake my profession.' I will follow the Lamb wheresoever He goeth. The hop in its growing windeth itself about the pole, and always followeth the course of the sun from east to west, so that it can by no means be drawn to the contrary, but chooseth rather to break than to yield."—*Trapp.*

"I have oftentimes noted, when women receive the doctrine of the gospel, they are more fervent in faith, they hold it more stiff and fast than men do, as we see in the loving Magdalen, who was more hearty and bold than Peter."—*Luther.*

"To her religion is no weak and drivelling fanaticism, but a life, a power, a heavenly glory."—*Wadsworth.*

"Naomi had said, and there was a sifting emphasis in her words, 'Thy sister has gone back unto her people and to her gods.' Ruth says, 'Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.'"—*Price.*

"O beautiful example,
For youthful minds to heed!
The good we do to others
Shall never miss its meed;
The love of those whose sorrows
We lighted shall be ours,
And o'er the path we walk in
That love shall scatter flowers."
Bryant.

VERSE 18.

Theme.—STEADFAST-MINDEDNESS.

"When all things have their trial, you shall find
Nothing is constant but a virtuous mind"—*Shirley.*

"I am constant as the northern star,
Of whose true, fixed, and resting quality
There is no fellow in the firmament."—*Shakespeare.*

[And] *when she saw that she was steadfastly minded to go with her, then she left speaking unto* [ceased to dissuade] *her.*

Older expositors have imagined that Naomi's efforts to persuade her daughters-in-law to return homeward were not altogether seriously meant . . . a dogmatic anachronism (*Lange*). The efforts to be looked upon as sincere, but limited in the direction the text points out; *when she saw*, etc. Only the omniscient God Himself can read the heart, and yet even He sees fit to try and to test His children. But mark, in a case like this, friendship can dissuade no longer, when love shows itself to be firmly resolved, "steadfastly minded."

Note. *After proof and trial made of their fidelity, we are to trust our brethren, without any further suspicion* (*Fuller*). Not to try before we trust is want of wisdom; not to trust after we have tried is want of charity (*ibid*). Naomi the elder, yet she yielded (*Braden*).

Learn, I. **That steadfast-mindedness does much to bring trial itself to an end.** The discipline of life has accomplished its purpose when it becomes plain and apparent that we are "fully persuaded." Ephraim is fully persuaded to evil, and God says, "Let him alone." Ruth is steadfastly minded towards good, and no further hindrances are to be placed in her way.

Note. (*a*) *Deciding for ourselves, we help others to a decision:* even those who love us and seek our best welfare. So, too, decision for Christ, and confession of Christ—the making it plain that we have chosen God's people to be ours—will bring those to be with us who formerly may have seemed to be against us. (*b*) *Many of the hindrances to our best and highest life are not meant permanently to hinder us.* They are obstacles only for the moment placed in our way, that we may overcome them, and use them as stepping-stones to higher things: at their worst they are only intended to hold us back from entering the kingdom until we are "fully persuaded." God wrestled with Jacob, with a desire to be conquered; so Naomi no doubt opposed Ruth, hoping and wishing that she herself might be foiled (*Fuller*). (*c*) *Opposition will cease generally the moment it is plain that opposition is in vain.* It is the wavering mind which invites persuasion, courts opposition; men spare their breath when they see that we are steadfastly minded, as the disciples at Cæsarea did with Paul (Acts xxi. 14).

Learn, II. **That earnestness of character is the secret of perseverance and final success** on the human side. "Hard pounding, gentlemen; but we will see who can pound the longest" (*Wellington at Waterloo*). The steadfast-minded are like the oak, deep-rooted, and so unmoved; like the iceberg in a swelling sea: the cause of its steadiness is its depth (*Arnot*). Lange and others translate "firmly resolved." The one phrase points to the cause, the other to its effect. Note. *With such to be fully persuaded is to be steadfast-minded.* This steady earnestness of purpose is like the vital energy in the animal and vegetable creation, without which they would languish and die (*Pilkington*).

We have here the silvern side of the shield of truth illustrated, viz., that we continue in the heavenward course, just as Ruth went onward towards the earthly Canaan, because we are fully persuaded and so steadfast-minded. (cf. Heb. xii.) Said of the Patriarchs, "they were persuaded," and that "if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out," like Ruth "they might have had opportunity to have returned."

The other and golden side of truth also illustrated here. Mark, *the influences came from Naomi, which bound Ruth to Naomi*, the attractions drawing her onward to Canaan came from that other and better land. So, too, in spiritual things we "are persuaded," but we are persuaded "of Him." In all affection which is to be lasting there must be the influences which attract, as well as the mind and spirit capable of being attracted. Love and life are always influenced from without. We speak of an affection laying hold of us. And note, it is only the life anchored within the veil by faith, "hid with Christ in God," which will bear without breaking the strain and stress of the storm.

So, too, Ruth was not without her own misgivings and realization of the weakness which is ours always. The Hebrew reads it "that she strengthened herself," that being their phrase to express an oath (*Fuller*).

IMPROVEMENT.—(1) Divine moment when a man can say that he is "fully persuaded." Henceforward the problem of life may be looked upon as solved—the light that shone upon our path has become a fixed and guiding star. (2.) A distinct step too, in all true progress, when others perceive our steadfast-mindedness to go onward. It is certain, my belief gains quite infinitely the moment I can convince another mind thereof (*Carlyle*). (3.) As the gold is not known but by the touchstone, so is not any Christian till he be thoroughly tried (*Topsell*).

Bernard on this :—

I. The godly wise are wary in their admittance of others into their company, till they well know them.

II. Words with an oath, and actions agreeing sufficiently, may persuade us of the steadfastness of the heart, and the inward disposition of the mind of such as show themselves virtuous.

III. An oath is the strengthening of the mind of him that sweareth.

IV. There is no reason to make further trial, where an honest resolution is or may be well discerned.

LESSONS.—Learn (1.) To try before we trust, and then to trust after sound trial. (2.) Not to put to further trial than need is, lest we weaken faith, etc.

"When Constantine was chosen emperor, he found several Christians in office; and he issued an edict requiring them to renounce their faith, or quit their places. Most of them gave up their offices to preserve their conscience; but some *cringed*, and renounced Christianity. When the emperor had thus made full proof of their dispositions of character, he removed all who basely complied with his *supposed* wishes, and retained the others; saying that those who would desert or deny their Divine Master would desert him, and were not worthy of his confidence."—*Dic. of Illustrations.*

"After supper, the dean having decanted a bottle of wine, poured what remained into a glass, and seeing it was muddy, presented it to Mr. Pilkington to drink it. 'For,' said he, 'I always keep some poor person to drink the foul wine for me.' Mr. Pilkington, entering into his humour, thanked him, and told him 'he did not know the difference, but was glad to get a glass at any rate.' 'Why then,' said the dean, 'you shan't, for I'll drink it myself.'"—*Sheridan's Life of Swift.*

"The goldsmith must purify the dross and ore from the gold, but he must be wary lest he make waste of good metal, if over-curious in too often refining. We may search and sound the sincerity of our brethren; but after good experience made of their uprightness, we must take heed lest, by continual sifting and proving them, we offend a weak Christian. 'Christ tried the woman of Syrophœnicia first with silence, then with two sharp answers; at last, finding her to be sound, He dismissed her with granting her request, and commending of her faith. When He had said to Peter the third time 'Lovest thou Me?' He rested satisfied with Peter's answer, and troubled him with no more questions."—*Fuller.*

"As soldiers, when they have long besieged a city, with the loss of time, money, and men, being hopeless to take it, they even sound a retreat, and retire home without accomplishing their desire; so Naomi, perceiving that all her arguments which she used to conquer Ruth, like water in the smith's forge cast on coals, did more intend [intensify] the heat of her constancy, gives over in my text."—*Fuller.*

"The mind can never be steady, whilst it stands upon other's feet, and till it be settled upon such grounds of assurances, that it will rather lead than follow; and can say with Joshua, whatsoever become of the world, 'I and my house will serve the Lord.'"—*Bishop Hall.*

"There is all the difference in the world between firmness and obstinacy, though they are constantly confounded. Firmness is a conscientious adherence to what is held to be right after a careful examination of the reasons that can be given for the opposite

course. Stubbornness is the tenacious maintenance of a position, whether it be right or wrong."—*Braden.*

"Naomi teaches us that there is 'a time to speak and a time to keep silence,' a time to entreat and a time to refrain from entreating, a time to argue and a time to yield in the argument, a time even when parents should concede to the wishes of their children, though contrary to their own judgment."—*Braden.*

"When our Saviour Christ had dealt with the Canaanitish woman about the like cause, seeing that silence would not answer her, nor denial satisfy her, nor the opprobrious word of dog dismay her, then He yielded to her desire, cured her daughter, and proclaimed her faith to be wonderful."—*Topsell.*

VERSES 19—21.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.—**So they two.** Types of the Jewish and Gentile Churches (*Macgowan*). Amicitia sit inter binos qui sunt veri, et bonos qui sunt pauci (*Trapp*). West. They were obliged to travel on foot (*Patrick, Gill*). If the more southern route was chosen, they would descend from the high table-land of Moab, cross the plain at the south-western extremity of the Dead Sea, part of the once larger vale of Siddim, where stood the cities of the plain, the soil of which is entirely covered with salt (*Eadie*), then turn northwards up the Wady Sudier to Engedi, and so to Bethlehem. If the more northern route, they would cross the two fords of Arnon and Jordan. In either case one of the most weird and desolate landscapes in the world, the scene of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, lay before them (cf. Deut. xxix. 23). **Came to Bethlehem** [cf. *Intro.*, p. 13]. **All the city was moved** [cf. 1 Sam. iv. 5; 1 Kings i. 45]. All the city was in a commotion about them (*Keniseh*). ἤχησε ἡ πολις. The city rang *with the news* (LXX.). All the city rejoiced at them (*Arab, Syriac*). The E.V. rightly uses the more comprehensive term which may include curiosity, surprise, gladness, etc. Amazement not so much at the fact that Naomi was still alive and had come back again, as at her returning in so mournful a condition (*Keil*). **And they said.** They in the Hebrew is feminine. The women of Bethlehem said (*Speaker's Com.*). Not exactly, *dicebantque mulieres*, as the Vulg. has it; the population of the city are the subject of the verb, but in a matter of this kind women would naturally be so prominent as to lead the narrator insensibly to use the feminine. Perhaps Naomi arrived in an hour of the day when the labours of the field left none but women in the city (*Lange*). The Midrash makes the scene still more dramatic by the explanation that the concourse of the inhabitants was occasioned by the fact that the first wife of Boaz had that very day been carried to her grave (*Lange*). May possibly have been some such public occasion.

Ver. 20. **Call me not Naomi** [pleasant. See on ver. 2, p. 14]. **Call me Mara** [bitter; LXX. πικραν; comp. Exod. xv. 23]. I have no more anything that is pleasant about me: my life, like a salty, bitter spring, is without flavour or relish (*Lange*). A similar allusion to the meaning of names, Gen. xxvii. 36; Jer. xx. 3 (*Speaker's Com.*). From this we gather that Naomi was not the name given her at first by her parents, but a popular name commonly given her by her neighbours, because of her comely presence and courteous behaviour (*Patrick?*) **The Almighty** [Shaddai]. The name Almighty is almost peculiar to the Pentateuch and to the Book of Job, in which last it is found thirty times. It occurs twice in the Psalms and four times in the prophets (*Speaker's Com.*). Why is Shaddai used here? Must be connected with its pregnant, proper signification (*Lange*), the source of fruitfulness and life. Used continually as in Gen. xxxv. 11; I am El Shaddai: be fruitful and multiply. The word must therefore unquestionably be referred to a root שָׁדָה still used in Arabic in the sense "to water, to fertilize." [See *Lange in loco.*] Naomi was rightly named, when with a flourishing family she went to Moab; but now Shaddai, who gave the blessing, has taken it away (*Lange*). Rashi and Adam Clarke explain Shaddai to mean self-sufficient. **Hath dealt very bitterly with me;** has worked against me (*Bertheau*); hath testified against [lit. hath answered] me (*Wordsworth*); hath inflicted bitter sorrow upon me (*Lange*); hath made me very sad (*Wright*). [Comp. Exod. xx. 16; 2 Sam. i. 16; Job x. 17; Mal. iii. 5.] A metaphor from adversaries at law (*Trapp*). So Job says, "Thou writest bitter things against me" (xiii. 26).

Ver. 21. **I went out full.** That is, in the rich possession of a husband and two sons (*Steele and Terry*). **Home again empty.** The very reverse of Jacob's experience (Gen. xxxii. 10): "With my staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands." Cf. Hannah's song (1 Sam. ii. 5). "They that were full have hired out themselves for bread." Though the Hebrew "full," there meaning *full of food*, is quite different from that here used, which is the opposite of empty (*Speaker's Com.*). **The Lord** [*Jehovah*] **hath testified against me.** Και κυριος εταπεινωσε με (LXX.). The reading of the LXX., "He humbled me," was justly departed from, for it is only a paraphrase of the sense (*Lange*). Quam Dominus humiliavit (*Vulg.*). The Lord has brought me back in vain (*Syr.*), has sent down upon me a terrible punishment (*Arab.*). On the whole, we incline to prefer the ordinary translation (*Wright*). So Lange, Tremel., Drusius, Gesen., Rosenm. That which Bertheau considers to be the difficulty of the passage, that it makes God to testify against a person, while elsewhere only men bear testimony,

is precisely the special thought of Naomi. "I went," she says, "and God has testified that this going was a sin" (*Lange*). In the loss of my children and family, says Naomi, I perceive that He "declares me guilty," as the Targum excellently renders it (*ibid*). Comp. for a similar turn of thought, 1 Kings xvii. 18, followed at ver. 20 by the identical word here rendered **hath afflicted,** there **thou hast brought evil** (*Speaker's Com.*).

VERSE 19.

Theme.—COMPANIONSHIP IN PROGRESS.

"Along the solitary plain we went,
As one who unto the lost road returns,
And till he finds it seems to go in vain."—*Dante.*

"Not enjoyment, and not sorrow,
Is our destined end or way,
But to act, that each to-morrow
Finds us farther than to day."—*Longfellow.*

So they two went until they came to Bethlehem.

In life action is everything, and joy and sorrow come of themselves (*Goethe*). Onward with these two means that they are nearer every moment to Canaan, the land of promise, and Bethlehem, the house of bread. A rough way, but the right way (*Philpot*)—a difficult journey, but a wise one; onward from weakness to strength, poverty to riches, disquietude to rest. Moab behind them, the promised land in front.

"Linked hand in hand they went, tears in their eyes.
As faint and beautiful as eyes of flowers."—*Alexander Smith.*

Note. *Pilgrimage is the appointed lot of God's saints;* for true life is always moving onward, progressing.

We have here, I. **Companionship in Progress.** *They two went.* Their *principles* were one, the life and love of God in the soul. Their *object* was one, to come and trust in the shadow of the Divine wings (ii. 12). Their *interest* was common, the salvation of their souls and communion by the way (*Macgowan*). So Lot and his daughters went hand in hand out of Sodom, led of the angels to a place of safety. Note. *The world is our wilderness,* and we are happy only as the path leads us onward to a place of rest. *They came to Bethlehem* [the house of bread]. How many accompany each other to Bethaven! [house of iniquity.] Our travellers are an emblem of the righteous, who hold on their way, etc. (*Macgowan*). They went together lovingly, they ceased not to go on, they did not linger, they took no by-paths, neither forgot they whither they were going, till they came unto Bethlehem (*Bernard*). See also on ver. 6, 7; pp. 32—36.

II. **Mutual sympathy in affliction.**—The Holy Spirit mentioneth not what discourse they exchanged by the way; yet no doubt they were neither silent, nor busied in unprofitable talk (*Fuller*). Note. *Two things prevented them sinking into despair, their piety and their mutual love.* An instance here of God's faithfulness in restoring comfort to His mourners. Elimelech and his sons taken. Ruth given as a fast friend. When Abraham lost Sarah, Rebekah is brought into her tent (*Macgowan*). Note. (*a*) *True companionship embraces three things, love, unity, and constancy.* Friends must be of one mind and one heart, if they would journey together. These united in an indissoluble bond of love (*Cox*). (*b*) *Only in looking heavenward, not in looking earthward, do what we call union, mutual love, society, begin to be possible* (*Carlyle*).

III. **Fellowship and communion in desire and hope.**—Both are journeying to join the Israel of God. Probably they were beguiling the way by anticipations of the future; for now that Naomi has taken Ruth more closely to herself, their interests are inseparable, whatever may unfold. Note. *They are to be admitted unto our fellowship, whom we find to be constant in a good course, and true lovers of*

goodness, whatsoever they were before (*Bernard*). Thus God's angels deal with us; they will account us their fellow-servants when we turn to God (*ibid*).

IMPROVEMENT.—(1.) God leaves His saints generally neither companionless nor comfortless. Luke, Mark, Titus, Timothy given and sent at different times to Paul [cf. 2 Cor. vii. 6]. And where man's company fails, He will send His angels. Jacob was comforted of heaven when earth failed him (Gen. xxviii. 12). And when the disciples slept in Gethsemane, an angel appeared strengthening the Saviour. (2.) Success always attends our efforts when they are in accordance with Divine purposes. *They came to Bethlehem.* Naomi is at home once more; and for the first time Ruth stands on the sacred spot where the Saviour is to be born. How much depended upon the journey, humanly speaking! Fit emblem of another journey to another land of promise.

"Is it a long way off?
Oh! no, a few more years,
A few more bitter tears,—
We shall be there.
Sometimes the way seems long,
Our comforters all go,
Woe follows after woe,
Care after care."
* * * *
'Tis no uncertain way
We tread, for Jesus still
Leads with unerring skill
Where'er we roam;
And from the desert wild
Soon shall our path emerge,
And land us on the verge
Of our dear home."—*E. W. Dic. of Poetic Illustrations.*

"Naomi's heart throbs with mingled feelings as they pass along the way traversed by her and her venerated dead some ten years before. The sight of the beloved city and the familiar spots quickens a crowd of painful memories. Those who have returned to their native country and their childhood's home after a prolonged absence know too well how everything looks familiar yet strange, old yet sometimes new, and a thousand thoughts throng to the mind, and tearful emotions surge in the heart, at every turn of the way."—*Braden.*

"A man may turn whither he pleases, and undertake anything whatsoever, but he will always return to the path which nature has prescribed for him."—*Goethe.*

"Often again in his course of life man feels as a feathered seed driven by winds; as if, without weight or power, he slowly floats or is swiftly hurried, but rests nowhere. He feels that within him is life, but knows that he is as yet an embryo. He is confusedly conscious of what his tendencies are, but cannot tell what his outgrowth will be. . . . Let him but find resting place, and he also will put forth buds and boughs, and array himself in beauty."—*Lynch.*

"Life is only bright when it proceedeth
Towards a truer, deeper life above;
Human love is sweetest when it leadeth
Towards a more divine and perfect love.

Learn the mystery of Progression duly;
Do not call each glorious change decay;
But know, we only hold our treasures truly
When it appears as if they fade away.

Nor dare to blame God's gifts for incompleteness—
In that want their beauty lies: they roll
Towards some infinite depths of love and sweetness,
Bearing onwards man's reluctant soul!"
Adelaide A. Proctor.

"Men's mid-day, cold, and slow pace to heaven will cause many a man to want his lodgings at night, and to lie in the fields."—*Fuller.*

"To walk with Love in Love's own country will be as easy as it is happy; but here, where love is put upon its trial, it is not so. It is to walk as with a thorn in your foot, which gives great pain at every step—new pain in an old wound."—*Lynch.*

"Permanent rest is not to be expected on the road, but at the end of the journey."—*Dillwyn.*

"Though God may bring us into the wilderness, yet if He speak comfortably to us, the wilderness will be turned into a paradise. . . . If the road is rough, let us not complain, for it leads to a glorious rest which nothing shall disturb."—*Charles.*

"Make all plain and clear, and what sphere is there left for that trust by which the soul learns to lean upon God Himself? To see all the pathway, and know whither it leads, and what are the difficulties in the way, and how they are to be avoided, that is sight,

and not faith. But when 'light is given, and yet the way is hid,' when the little we know points to a deeper mystery, and beyond there is the darkness and uncertainty from which the spirit shrinks and life holds back, when we stand like the Israelites at the Red Sea, the swollen waters in front, the mountains on either hand, the enemy behind, and none to help us but God; it is then that faith either falters and fails, or triumphs and shows itself inestimable, most precious when most needed, just as the miner's candle is valued beyond all else when the gloom is densest and the way most intricate."—*B.*

"The more the cross, the more the longing:
Out of the vale man upward goes;
Whose pathway through the desert lies;
He craves the land where Jordan flows:
When here the dove finds no repose,
Straight to the ark with joy she flies."
Schmolk.

"It is a mere and miserable solitude to want true friends, without which the world is but a wilderness. . . . There is no man that imparteth his joys to his friend, but he joyeth the more; and no man that impart-eth his griefs, but he grieveth the less."—*Bacon.*

"Then I saw in my dream, they went very lovingly on together, and had sweet discourse of all things that had happened to them in their pilgrimage."—*Bunyan.*

"It is with Christians as with burning coals. If these are scattered far apart, one after the other is easily extinguished, but when collected together, the fire of one preserves that of the other, and the glowing coals often ignite others that lie near."—*Franke.*

"'Daughter,' ye softly said—'Peace to thine heart;
We too—yes, daughter!—have been as thou art,
Tossed on the troubled waves, life's stormy sea;
Chance and change manifold proving like thee,
Hope-lifted, doubt-depressed, seeing in part,
Tried, troubled, tempted, sustained as thou art:
Our God is *thy* God; what He willeth is best:
Trust Him as we trusted, then rest as we rest.'"
Caroline Southey.

VERSE 19.

Theme.—A CITY IN ASTONISHMENT.

"The blast of death
Hath stript our roof trees; the guardian boughs
Hang like sad willows o'er the stream of life,—
Where drifting slowly by our native shores,
Familiar faces smile on us no more."—*Mackay.*

And it came to pass, when they were come to Bethlehem, that all the city was moved about them, and they said, Is this Naomi?

Naomi's return was no common occurrence. Probably the inhabitants of Bethlehem never expected to see her more (*Lawson*). The city, and especially the women, were thrown into a peaceable uproar. Everybody ran, told the news, and wondered (*Lange*). The great change in Naomi's circumstances apparent in her appearance, in her very way of entering Bethlehem. Ten years ago she had left under far different circumstances. She went out with a husband, children, wealth; as she herself says, "full." The story well remembered, for the family was a prominent one in Bethlehem; natural that the news of her return, poor and sorrowful, should spread like wildfire, and create what to her was an unpleasant sensation (*Lange*). Is this Naomi? Note. *No questions cut so keenly as those which remind us of beloved ones who have passed into the shadow of death* (*Braden*).

See in these words, **I. The language of surprise and astonishment.** Strange! Wonderful! Is this she who was once so wealthy? How quickly is a river of riches drained dry! (*Fuller.*) Is this, *can it be, Naomi?* Time and sorrow, too, had wrought their cruel work upon her. Ten years, and such troubles as hers, leave terrible marks at her time of life (*Braden*). The rose withered unlike what it was when blooming (*Matt. Henry*). She that formerly was so fair, now one can scarcely read the traces of beauty in her face (*Fuller*). Is *this* Naomi? Note. (*a*) *The more renowned any are in prosperity, the more remarkable are they in*

adversity (*Bernard*). Men are more carried away by the consideration of the outward means how things come to pass, than of the power and pleasure of God to make such an alteration (*ibid*). And so (*b*) *God's providential doings are a continual cause of surprise*—as full of mystery as they are of mercy; necessarily so if faith is to have its perfect work. He brings about great changes in persons, families, cities, countries. And that often in ways least expected. The poor are exalted, the rich cast down; empires seemingly established for ever, like Babylon and Rome, coming to nought; cities destroyed, etc. (Cf. Lam. ii. 15, "Is this the city that men call the perfection of beauty?" etc.; Rev. xviii. 15—17.)

II. The language of condemnation. May be feared there was more blame than pity in the exclamation (*Cox*). See! see! this is she that could not be content to tarry at home to take part of the famine with the rest of her fellows (*Fuller*). Perhaps they were *moved about her*, lest she should be a charge to the town, she looked so bare (*Matt. Henry*). Men judge mainly by outward appearances

> "Virtue without success
> Is a fair picture shown by an ill light."—*Dryden.*

Under the old economy, too, adversity was looked upon largely as meaning punishment. Only the nobler spirits seem to realize the meaning and ministry of suffering. A trace of this to be found among the heathens, as in the seven years' probation of Eneas:—

> "Long labours, both by sea and land, he bore,
> And in the doubtful war, before he won
> The Sabian realm, and built the destined town."—*Virgil.*

But even this was associated with fate and "the wrath of the gods." Note. *The multitude in all ages have traced afflictions to the anger of the Deity.* (See Job viii. 6, xi. 20, etc.) Difficult for Christians to realize always that "whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth."

So that we may have here, **III. The language of contempt.** The crowd come and look upon a spectacle like this, and then pass away to their usual avocations, some at least pointing the finger of scorn. David was cursed of Shimei in his affliction, and God's prophet saluted with the cry, "Go up, thou bald head." The man of God must expect to be misunderstood in all that concerns him, even in the Divine dealings with him. Christ said to His disciples, "The time cometh that whosoever killeth you will think he doeth God service." Note. *Hatred to the good seems inherent to the evil heart; and poverty brings contempt upon the best.* Proud hearts take contempt in adversity as worse than death (*Bernard*); but we must learn to bear it as Naomi, as David, as Christ did.

We may have here, **IV. The language of pity and commiseration.** Alas! alas! is not this that gracious woman, that godly saint, which formerly by her charity relieved many in distress? How soon is a full clod turned into parched earth! one that supplied others into one that needeth to be supplied by others! (*Fuller.*) "*How has the gold become dim!*" Those that had seen the magnificence of the first temple wept when they saw the meanness of the second (*Matt. Henry*). There are always hearts that are touched in a right way at the sight of sorrow and trouble. The priest and the Levite may come and look on and pass by on the other side; but some good Samaritan draws nearer sooner or later to pour in oil and wine into the open wounds. Naomi evidently moved by the expression, Is this Naomi? She utters no word of reproach afterwards against the inhabitants of Bethlehem. Note. *Good and godly people do not less esteem the virtuous because of their outward low estate and poverty* (*Bernard*). The poor around us test the sincerity of our professions of religion. Christ will say at last, "Inasmuch as ye did it not," etc.

IMPROVEMENT.—(1) The same language may have a very different meaning in different lips. (2) Our very surprise at adversity should be mingled with com-

passion, and meted out with sympathy. Idle words, how they wound the broken heart! Is this Naomi? brings back the memory of all the past. (3) In adversity we should be comforters, not as Job's friends, who sat down and censured him, nor as Christ's and St. Paul's, who forsook them (*Bernard*), not even as Naomi's, whose casual words open the fountains of grief afresh; but as those who themselves have suffered, and have the meek and gentle spirit suffering only can bring. (4) When we remark the sad changes which numbers suffer, we should be reminded to prepare for changes ourselves, especially the last great change (*Scott*).

"Their exclamation, 'This Naomi!' expresses the general astonishment at the change which had passed upon her. No doubt the little hamlet had been all aflame with gossip when, ten years before, the rich sheep-master Elimelech had left it, and many pious brows had been shaken over his sin in going to sojourn among the heathen. And no doubt, on Naomi's return, many who would have shared that sin if they could, and many who had committed far worse sins than any of which she had been guilty, once more shook their heads in grave rebuke, and were forward to recognize the judgments of an offended God in the calamities which had befallen her."—*Cox.*

Naomi was formerly a woman of good quality and fashion, of good rank and repute; otherwise her return in poverty had not so generally been taken notice of. Shrubs may be grubbed to the ground, and none miss them; but every one marks the falling of a cedar. Grovelling cottages may be levelled to the earth, and none observe; but every traveller takes notice of the fall of a steeple. Let this comfort those to whom God hath given small possessions. Should He visit them with poverty, and take from them what little they have, yet their grief and shame would be the less; they should not have so many fingers pointed at them, so many eyes staring on them, so many words spoken of them. They might lurk in obscurity. It must be a Naomi, a person of eminence and estate, whose poverty must move a whole city."—*Fuller.*

"If we would truly sympathise with others, we must beware of hastily estimating the manner and degree of their trouble. . . . . Comforters must come as inquirers, not judges; come to bestow consolation, not criticism."—*Lynch.*

"To seek the applause of man is wrong; but to merit it is most desirable. A man of worthless character creates no respect in the minds of others, so that if ill befall him, he finds but little sympathy in the bosom of those around him; whereas a good man under misfortune excites a lively interest in his affairs."—*Simeon.*

"The feelings of men are easily excited for those who have met severe and peculiar afflictions; but in the generality of mankind those feelings soon die away, and, even while exciting, rarely produce any practical effect. 'The whole city was moved' about Naomi, but we are not told that one door was opened to receive her, and we soon find her rejoicing in being allowed to partake of the last and lowest resource of the destitute. Few remember how large a proportion of pure and undefiled religion consists in visiting the fatherless and widows in their affliction."—*Macartney.*

"Outward contact never accords with the epoch of inner culture, and therefore, as it cannot further us, must necessarily injure us."—*Goethe.*

"We all suffer from the want of genuine human help and sympathy. But often, to meet our particular case, it is required that those around us possess a higher than the average goodness. We must not curse humanity because we cannot find the man we want."—*Lynch.*

"There is 'salvation in fulness,' and there is 'salvation by fire.' There is the 'abundant entrance' into the kingdom of God, and there is the getting in with something like 'difficulty.' One man may be conducted to his 'joy and crown' through thronging multitudes, amid outstretched hands and reverberating hosannas, and along the great public thoroughfare of the city; while another shall advance with hesitating step; be glad to get an entrance without observation; be met by no congratulating crowds; creep stealthily by some unfrequented street to his undistinguished abode; tremulous with a thankful, though shaded joy, that he is saved at all."—*Binney.*

VERSE 20.

Theme.—SPIRITUAL DESPONDENCY AND DEPRESSION.

"Grief hath changed me,
And careful hours, with Time's deformèd hand,
Hath written strange defeatures in my face."—*Shakespeare.*

"We overstate the ills of life, and take
Imagination, given us to bring down
The choir of singing angels . . . .

to rake
The dismal snows instead; flake flowing flake,
To cover all the corn. . . . .
O brothers! let us leave the shame and sin
Of talking vainly, in a plaintive mood,
The holy name of Grief,—holy herein,
That by the grief of one came all our good."—*Mrs. Browning.*

Call me not Naomi, call me Mara: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, etc.

Ten years have turned Naomi into Mara (*Bp. Hall*). Ten years and departure into the far-off land (cf. Luke xv. 14). This is what sojourning in Moab meant then and always; affliction, barrenness, want, even to those who are least guilty. So Israel had to come out from Egypt, though they found a Goshen there for awhile, "in haste," and as from a land of bondage. Note. *Man goes, but God brings home* (*Lange*). The departure is all our own, the return is His with whom we have to do.

Remark, **I. On the changes incident to human life.** Its sweet and pleasant things become bitter, its fulness emptiness, its prosperous goings out disastrous. Note. (*a*) *This is not by chance, but by the providence of God.* A peculiarity of piety, that it ascribes the issues of all the affairs of life to God (*Lange*). He turns Naomi into Mara, mirth into mourning, sweet into sour, honour into dishonour (*Bernard*). As examples we have Job, Haman, Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, Herod, beyond the memorable instance of the text. Outward glory is but as a fading flower, and as the warm sunshine of a cold wintry day, soon gone, and all the delight thereof (*Bernard*). Note. (*b*) *Every man's estate is in the hands of the Lord to alter as He will.*

Remark, **II. On the meaning and manner of these changes.** (1) *Life means discipline, and therefore pain is a secondary question to that of our perfection.* God denies and takes away, just as the sculptor does with the marble, that he may bring out the ideal form beneath. He finds it sometimes best to cross the likely projects of His dearest children (*Bishop Hall*). "If God have loved thee," says Bengel, "thou canst have no lack of trouble."

Again, (2) *Experience comes in this way:* we grow strong, not only in conflict, but in times when we must bear as well as do. "Thou therefore, my son, *endure* hardship," etc. (2 Tim. ii. 3). The soldier must pass through his baptism of fire, and the Christian his baptism of suffering.

Once more, (3) We never understand life aright until we see in it *two wills in conflict, the human and the Divine.* Our thoughts and purposes at best are not His with whom we have to do. Mark, the choice in life is with us, the issues with Him. There is the exercise of free will on our part, and there are His foreordained purposes. And note, *His purposes will be accomplished, even though He deal bitterly with us.* In all our projects we must expect that God may testify against us as against Naomi. He does so as seeing the end from the beginning, the true meaning of life amid its outward and plausible appearances. Man in his abundance, too, is apt to forget God. Adversity, denial, is the Divine way of calling our thoughts back again to Himself. No doubt God does deal bitterly with men at times. The profoundest love may show itself in this way, as with the parent when he corrects his child; the most far-reaching wisdom, as with the physician when he cures with distasteful remedies. [See also on ver. 13, pp. 50—52.]

Remark, **III. On spiritual depression as accompanying these changes.** Usually, the natural man, even as a beggar, still desires to shine (*Lange*). Not so Naomi. Her humility regards not a glorious name in a dejected state (*Matt. Henry*). She hates this hypocrisy, and since God hath humbled her, desires not to be respected of men (*Bishop Hall*). A poor widow now, though once a noble woman. Call me not Naomi, she says, call me Mara. Note. We have in this

the bitterness of grief, not of impatience; something of that shadow which has fallen at times upon the noblest spirits. We call it *spiritual depression, religious despondency, melancholy, etc.*, and in it the heart does not so much *murmur* against the burden of life as *feel* it. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.

Enquire (1) *As to some of the causes of this spiritual depression.* Sin in ourselves, wrong-doing of others, peculiar mental and physical conditions, unsolved problems of this our existence. Or, as here, adverse circumstances, and the lowliness of human life (Ps. lxxxviii. 8). Naomi's losses have followed one another like Job's, hence her bitter cry. So Elijah in the hour of depression said, "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life." Note. *With all men there is a cloudy and dark day;* and the world within us generally reflects the world without.

> "Many of God's most precious gifts are sad;"

and so far in the world's history the best songs, like the nightingale's, have been sung in the dark.

Again with Naomi, *God Himself seems to be against her, afflicting her.* Her loving heart takes all God's judgments on itself (*Lange*). She is humble, repentant, but also keenly sensitive and alive to the hand above her. A great alleviation of pain to see God in our afflictions [cf. on ver. 13, p. 50, div. I.], but there is a dark side even to this. "*The Lord hath testified against me.*" It is not only God hiding Himself, but God against her, as an advocate pleading, as a witness testifying on the other side. This the bitterest drop in her cup of affliction, which makes her ready to disclaim her very name, and all the past of her history. So, too, in a more mysterious sorrow the cry went up, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" Note. *God testifies against His own children.* His saints are by no means perfect in love, in faith, in obedience; and He will continue to testify until His own purposes are accomplished in them.

Enquire (2) *As to the Divine meaning in connexion with spiritual depression.* Afflictions (*a*) sent as chastisement, (*b*) allowed as discipline, (*c*) part of a wider problem in the history of the human race.

So with that chastened, humbled, and even sorrowful frame of mind, which accompanies them. Undue sorrow is better than undue security. Where the showers fall most, there the grass is greenest (*Spurgeon*). Just as some islands owe their fertility to the humidity of the atmosphere, the very clouds that darken and the rains that deluge the land, so many Christians owe their richest and divinest experiences to the sorrow which has darkened all their life. No chastening, says the Apostle, for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; *but afterwards* it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness (Heb. xii. 11). And Christ Himself likens the disciples, in the hour of His trial, to a woman in travail (John xvi. 20—22).

> "The night is darkest before the morn:
> When the pain is sorest, the child is born;
> And the day of the Lord is at hand."—*Kingsley.*

Again, just as the capacity for sorrow proves man above the brute, so this very sensitiveness to God's dealings shows the saint superior to the worldling. "Sanctified afflictions," says Dodd, with deep insight into God's dealings with His children, "are spiritual promotions." He treats us as sons (Heb. xii. 7). And so the godly sorrow, our burden to-day, will be our glory to-morrow. Paul felt this when he said, "Our light affliction," etc. (cf. 1 Cor. iv. 11—13; 2 Cor. iv. 16—18, vi. 8—10).

LESSONS. (1) The condition of creatures is soon changed (*Macgowan*) (2) Afflictions may make that which was once our glory seem and sound like irony to us. With Naomi, the very remembrance of her name increases her grief. (3) Those who are truly humbled are not ashamed that the world should think them so. In all forms of good there are more that care to seem than to be (*Bishop Hall*). Many that are debased and impoverished, yet affect to be called

by the empty names and titles of honour they formerly enjoyed (*Matt. Henry*). Not so Naomi. (4) When our condition is brought down, we may and must expect our spirits to be humbled with it. (5) Neither dignity of place, highness of birth, nor fruitfulness of children, may minister comfort to those whom the Lord has humbled (*Topsell*). The hand that smites is the only hand that can heal; and worldly misery is only abated entirely by everlasting felicity. (6) It is not an affliction itself, but an affliction *rightly borne, that does us good* (*Matt. Henry*). "*So, friend, I see that thou hast not yet forgiven God Almighty!*" the rebuke of Ebenezer Adams to a lady of rank, a widow, he was visiting. The reproof produced such an effect, that she immediately had all her trappings of grief destroyed, and went about her necessary business and avocations. So many calamities have been lost upon you if you have not yet learned how to suffer (*Sen. ad Helv.*). Behold us willing to suffer in this life the worst it may please Thee to bring upon us; here lay Thy rod upon us; consume us here, cut us to pieces here, only spare us in eternity (*St. Augustine*). (7) It is no part of religion to harden ourselves against the rod. "Thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved" (Jer. v. 3), is the charge the prophet brings against Jerusalem; but we nowhere find them condemned for feeling too keenly (*Macartney*).

"She put her mouth in the dust, and spake in a low language, suitable to her present condition; God had afflicted her, and she would carry her sails accordingly. Many are humbled, but not humble; low, but not lowly. These have lost the fruit of their affliction, saith Augustine, and are therefore most miserable. God, saith another, calls no man Benjamin, but those whom their own hearts call Ben-oni in their humility. He salutes them not Naomi, beautiful, who do not humbly feel themselves Mara, bitter."—*Trapp.*

"If all our afflictions come from the Almighty, it is in vain, as well as impious, to contend with Him that smites. Shall the potsherds of the earth strive with their Maker, who has all power to do with them as He pleases? He cannot effectually be opposed, and He can do nothing that is wrong. Weak mortals may injure their fellow-creatures for their own advantage, but what profit can it be to the Almighty that He should oppress the work of His own hands?"—*Lawson.*

We ought not so to lament the comfort we have lost, as to think that all our future days must be spent in bitterness."—*Ibid.*

"Wonder not at David, if he crieth in the anguish of his heart: at Job, if he complaineth in the bitterness of his soul: at Jeremiah, if he lamenteth in the extremity of his grief; for even then they are swallowing of a potion which is bitter unto flesh and blood."—*Fuller.*

"It will always remain a wonder to the majority of men what the agonies of some spirits mean. Questions which scorch the spirit like burning lava, pitiful wailings after light, gaspings of the oppressed soul for fresh air and liberty, they know nothing of. I have met men and women who had been familiar with sorrow in many forms. Fortune had not favoured them—fortune is strangely capricious: in whatever direction the golden veins run in this world, they had never somehow struck into one; the gifts of health had been niggardly doled out to them, and the common enemy death had passed through their homes, and his footsteps had dried up the springs which, amid all the world's weariness, had been so refreshing. These trials they had borne patiently and humbly. But the pain which was almost impossible to bear, the blow which made the soul stagger and reel was this, the light went. They were left in mental darkness; there was nothing to guide the soul by; perplexity, uncertainty, bewilderment throughout the whole realm of religion."—*Morlais Jones.*

"Now I saw in my dream, that just as they had ended this talk, they drew nigh to a very miry slough that was in the midst of the plain, and they being heedless did both fall suddenly into the bog. The name of the slough was DESPOND."—*Bunyan.*

"Men spoil their own lives, and then complain that life is evil; they mar and rend the picture, and murmur because its beauty has disappeared; they run the ship upon the rocks, and weep to find her a wreck; they crush the flower with a rude hand, and are disappointed because it withers."—*Thomas Jones.*

"As torrents that are dried up in the heat of summer, when there is most need of them, so all comforts fail in the extremity, that are not derived from the fountain of life."—*Dr. Bates.*

"Sorrow is the substance of man's natural life, and it might almost be defined to be his natural capability of the supernatural; nothing has a lasting interest for man which is not in some way connected with sorrow; sorrow is the poetry of a creation which is fallen, of a race which is in exile in a vale of tears."—*F. W. Faber.*

"The cross is always ready, and waits for thee in every place. . . . Why hopest, then to avoid that from which no human being has been exempt? Thou art deceived, wretchedly deceived, if thou expect anything but

tribulation; for this whole mortal life is full of care, and signed on every side with the cross."—*Thomas à Kempis.*

"What is sixty years' pain to eternity? We never think of sorrow in our dreams; wherefore should we in the dream of life?"—*Jean Paul Richter.*

"A few in every age have known the divine art of carrying sorrow and trouble as wonderful food, as an invisible garment that clothed them with strength; as a mysterious joy, so that they suffered gladly, rejoicing in infirmity, and holding up their heads with sacred presages; whenever times were dark and troublous, let the light depart from their eyes, that they might by faith see nobler things than sight could reach."—*Beecher.*

"Darkness shows us worlds of light
We never saw before."—*Moore.*

"The cares and infelicities of life, which are spoken of as 'hindrances to grace,' may be hindrances, but they are the only helps it has in this world. The voice of provocation is the voice of God calling us to the practice of patience.

"A man in his old age is like a sword in a shop window: men that look upon the perfect blade do not imagine the process by which it was completed. Man is a sword. Daily life is the workshop, and God is the artificer; and those cares which beat him upon the anvil, and file his edge, and eat in, acid-like, the inscription upon his hilt,—these are the very things that fashion the man."—*Beecher.*

"No men have need to be so vigilant, so attentive, so listening, so appreciative, as those who are in deep trouble. Sorrow is Mount Sinai. If one will go up and talk with God face to face, he must not fear the voice of thunder, nor the trumpet sounding long and loud."—*Beecher.*

"I have read of a fountain that at noonday is cold, and at midnight it grows warm; so many a precious soul is cold God-ward, and heaven-ward, and holiness-ward, in the day of prosperity, that grows warm God-ward, and heaven-ward, and holiness-ward in the midnight of adversity."—*Brooks.*

"Prosperity is the blessing of the Old Testament; adversity is the blessing of the New, which carrieth the greater benediction and the clearer revelation of God's favour"—*Lord Bacon.*

"The good man suffers but to gain,
And every virtue springs from pain;
As aromatic plants bestow
No spicy fragrance while they grow;
But crushed or trodden to the ground,
Diffuse their balmy sweets around."
Goldsmith.

"I see not a step before me as I tread the
days of the year,
But the past is still in God's keeping, the
future His mercy shall clear;
And what looks dark in the distance may
brighten as I draw near.

For perhaps the dreaded future has less
bitterness than I think;
The Lord may sweeten the water before I
stoop to drink,
Or if Marah must be Marah, He will stand
beside its brink.

* * * *

So I go on not knowing. I would not if I
might;
I would rather walk on in the dark with
God, than go alone in the light;
I would rather walk with Him by faith
than walk alone by sight.

My heart shrinks back from trials which
the future may disclose,
Yet I never had a sorrow, but what the
dear Lord chose;
So I send the coming tears back, with the
whispered word, 'He knows.'"

VERSE 21.

Theme.—PAINFUL REMEMBRANCES.

"This is truth the poet sings,
That a sorrow's crown of sorrow is remembering happier things."—*Tennyson.*

"Brothers, hush! the Lord Christ's hands
Ev'n now are stretched in blessing o'er the sea and o'er the lands.
Sit not like a mourner, brother! by the grave of that dear past;
Throw the present! 'tis thy servant only when 'tis overcast.
Give battle to the leaguèd world; if thou'rt worthy, truly brave,
Thou shalt make the hardest circumstance a helper and a slave."
Alexander Smith.

I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home empty again: why, then,? etc.

Sooner or later the time comes in the history of good men when things begin to show themselves as they are. Appearances deceive us no longer. The scales fall from our eyes. Life stands out in its true relationships, and we read, plain as

the handwriting on Babylon's walls, the lessons God would have us learn from the past. We come more completely to ourselves, and that moment, even to the best of men, is one of contrition and regret, and often of painful self-accusation.

Naomi is evidently passing through such a time in this the hour of her return. A penitent feeling pervades her lamentation (*Lange*). She left her people in the day of famine, and now she comes back to them, the famine in her own heart. Life has narrowed itself to a question between herself and God. Her emptiness is of Him, but her going away is all her own. She went out of her own free will, though others led her; and in contrast with this comes the doings of the God of the Israel she left behind. I went because it was my will to go, not God's; now God's judgment has sent me back (*Lange*).

Note. (*a*) *To go out of God's way is to go out of His protection* (*Macgowan*); but (*b*) *to go against His will is to come under the sweep of His chastisements.*

We have here, **I. The true conception of human life.** (1) *God dealing in it personally, individually, with men.* A Scriptural doctrine found from Genesis to Revelation. Pre-eminently a Christian doctrine: "Even the very hairs of your head," etc. More than this, it is a reasonable doctrine. If there be no *special* providence, there is no providence at all; only blind fate, or resistless law. On any other theory which recognises a Deity, we are at the mercy of what is worse than chance—a God who thinks it beneath Him to regard His creatures; or worse still, a God who is chained and overmastered by His own laws.

(2) *Its departures and wanderings our own.* "I went out." If any might have blamed others, Naomi might. But not so, she blames herself alone. Note. *Self-condemnation a constant attendant upon Christian life.* "I went out full." So did the prodigal. People usually get full before they go out from God's way and habitation (*Macgowan*). She went out not for want, but for fear of want (*Bernard, Trapp*). (See on ver. 1, pp. 10—13.) She went out full of family happiness, of joy in her sons, and of hope of a cheerful old age, surrounded by children and children's children; but empty now of all these, without possessions and without hope (*Lange*). What a vivid picture of those who leave the way of God's ordinances and sanctuary privileges! They go out for gain, but they meet with gall and wormwood instead of honey (*Macgowan*). Note. *Our blindness oftentimes carries us into the perils we seek to eschew* (*Bishop Hall*).

(3) *Its better leadings and holier impulses, its repentance and return to God.* "The Lord hath," etc. Just as the planets are brought into their appointed orbits by the central and attractive force of gravitation, so it is between man and God. (See on ver. 7, div. I., p. 35). Mark, (*a*) *that she was brought home again.* Afflictions are not a consuming but a refining fire to the godly (*Secker*). And mark (*b*) *how she was brought back.* By weeping cross, Trapp says quaintly. "Home again empty," says the text. Jehoshaphat's ships were broken; Lot lost all; Josiah came home short (*Trapp*). Note as true always of such returns, that the backslider retraces his steps (1) with many tears and self-reproaches, (2) with conscious emptiness, (3) with total self-renunciation. Naomi renounces even her right to her former name. Why call me Naomi? Why speak a single word to remind me of my former glory? In my losses and in my loneliness, in all that belongs to my life, "the Lord hath testified against me." Men call her Naomi (pleasant, gracious, lovely); but she reads her life in a different fashion, and says, Call me Mara (bitterness). Note. *We fall short in the eyes of God, however we may seem in the eyes of our fellow-men.* Repentance and a change of heart always brings us to see this. The old nature and the old life is no longer Naomi, rather it is Mara to us.

We have here, **II. The true explanation of afflictions.** (1) *Always from God, if not always for punishment.* This one of the great lessons taught in the book of Job. So here. Naomi, not worse, not even so bad, as many around her who had so far escaped calamity. But God has a right to deal severely with the best of His children for their ultimate good. Mark the distinction; He *corrects* His

children, He *punishes* the wicked. The one act looks forward to a future perfectness, the other looks back only upon the past. The one is remedial and continual until the end is accomplished; the other waits and lingers in hope of repentance, but comes at last, swift as lightning, and sudden as the whirlwind. (Cf. Heb. xii. 5—11, with Ps. xxxvii. 9—13, 20, 38.)

(2) *Always having a meaning and a message, though not always in anger.* (See last outline, div. II.) Afflictions are represented here as God's *testimony* against those who have wandered from His ways. "The Lord hath testified," etc. He puts the straight way of His judgments side by side with our crooked ways. As that One who brings all things to pass, He brings our folly to fruition to confound us. He ripens our plans, and lo they are our undoing! It is not that He thwarts us; oftentimes He gives us the desire of our heart, and it is the strongest testimony to our sin. Note. *God not only testifies by word, but by act;* not only in revelation, but in providence. Our life a testimony in its circumstance, etc. God's will is being accomplished in it, as well as our own.

LESSONS. (1) The vanity of earthly possessions. So uncertain is that which we call fulness in the creature, an hour may strip us of all. Like a bladder, so is worldly prosperity; a puff doth make it swell, but a prick doth make it fall again (*Topsell*). (2) It is a sign of true grace when we ascribe the ills which come in life to the hand of God, while we take all the blame to ourselves. What is it but the child recognizing even in chastisement the hand of the Father?

Bernard on this:—

I. That it is a fault, voluntarily for safety of goods, through distrust, to leave God's people, and go to live among idolaters.

II. That there is no certainty in worldly wealth.

III. That oftentimes the ways and means which men take to prevent want, by the same they bring it on them.

IV. That such of God's children as go astray, He will bring home again, but yet with correction.

V. "*Why then call ye me Naomi?*" etc. That the humbled and afflicted take no pleasure to be remembered of their former prosperity by names and titles.

VI. That man's comfort is nothing able to allay the bitterness of God's discomforts on us.

VII. That afflictions are commonly the Lord's witnesses against us for something amiss in us.

"The Lord giveth, and the Lord hath taken away." When He gives, He is under no necessity of securing to us the possession of what He gives. We may soon provoke Him, by our sins, to bereave us of all that He hath given us; but however careful we may be to please Him, we cannot merit the continuance of His favours, and without any special provocation on our part He may have good reasons for impoverishing us, and placing us in conditions quite the reverse of those to which we have been accustomed. And one great reason why God so frequently changes men's prosperous condition into misery is to teach us the folly of trusting to our present enjoyment. 'But this I say, brethren, the time is short. It remaineth,' etc."—*Lawson.*

"It is hard to come down in the world through upright dealing, but harder still to stoop to dishonest dealing in order to keep up in the world. If the loss of temporal gain be the gain of eternal good, then the reverse of fortune is the reverse of misfortune.

"It is difficult to mourn without murmuring. We are permitted to weep and moan under the hand of God, but it is not easy to weep, to sorrow without excess; at once to feel the rod and to kiss it, to adore and to bless a correcting and bereaving God. How noble the spirit, and how pious the language of Job, when he exclaimed, 'The Lord gave,' etc."—*Toller.*

"There are times when we reason thus: the darkness is around us, therefore it will always be dark; the winter has been long and cold, hence summer will never arrive; troubles are come upon us, consequently we are to expect nothing but trouble. Thus does the mind take a melancholy pleasure in tormenting itself. We turn our back to the light, look at our own dark shadow cast upon the ground, and then cry out in sorrow that all things are and will be against us."—*Thomas Jones.*

"Afflictions are a testimony against men that they are sinners, but they are not always a testimony that the sufferer is guilty of some particular sins for which God chastiseth him" (Job ii. 3).—*Lawson.*

"God made men to be blessed. If the cry of broken hearts goes up to heaven, it is not His institution."—*Baldwin Brown.*

"Men think God is destroying them because He is tuning them. The violinist screws up the key till the tense cord sounds the concert pitch; but it is not to break it, but to use it tunefully, that he stretches the string upon the musical rack."—*Beecher.*

"She utters not a breath of accusation against Elimelech, or of excuse of herself. Properly speaking, the fault did lie with her husband and sons. They were the originators of the undertaking that ended so disastrously; but of this she has no memory."—*Lange.*

"She takes the whole blame on herself. She confesses that, in leaving 'the land of promise,' she was walking after her own will, not the will of God. But though she confesses her own sin, she utters no reproach against the beloved dead. 'I went because it was my will to go; and now God has taught me, by all I have suffered and lost, that it was wrong to go. He has justly emptied me of all my possessions, all my hopes.'"—*Cox.*

"It is nearly the same utterances as fell from her lips in parting with Orpah. Grief makes her almost fierce. The name she bears sounds like irony and a reproach."—*Braden.*

"It is good at times to be in distress, for it reminds us that we are in exile."—*Thomas à Kempis.*

"Those trials which come from God are never without benefit to us, when we receive them worthily, since there is always a rich harvest of spiritual blessings for the afflicted religious heart. If human nature at first shrinks from sorrow, faith and Christian hope soon come to its support; the trial then appears easy to be borne. *Receive it as from God, and its bitterness is past.* . . . Indeed, the peace which is always found in this submission is itself a great blessing, even without any exterior alleviation of sorrow. It is a peace so much the more pure as it is unconnected with the world."—*Fenelon.*

"But the problem of our life is solved in and by Jesus Christ. He has explained its nature, purpose, and ending. Without Him the world is a haunted house, disturbed by strange noises—half-formed apparitions glide through the gloom, and the inhabitants are sore afraid; but possessing His revelation, we know it to be the outer court of the heavenly temple, and we hear already the harmonious voices of the worshippers in the inner sanctuary praising God for their existence. Christ is our refuge from fear."—*Thomas Jones.*

"The martyrdom of an hour is sudden glory, but the martyrdom of a life—there needs something more than human to endure this."—*Spurgeon.*

"Oh ye who suffer, whatsoe'er it is
Hath brought this fellowship with Christ to try the heart,
Know that the angel ministering is God's;
And suffering e'en as doing is the better part.

And ye who, cumbered with much care or pain,
Sleep not, but count the weary hours, and wish for morn;
Lo! from the pentecost of sorrow yours to-day,
The pentecost of joy to-morrow shall be born.

And ye who sorrow for a light that's quenched
For love that gladdened all the morning of life's day;
By all the sacred tears that Jesus wept,
The dead ye mourn are sleeping, and not lost for aye.

Our friend he sleepeth, said the Master once,
So named He man's last hour, when fails the feeble breath.
A sickness to God's glory; through the ages thence
New meaning lurks to us in sorrow, suffering, death."—*B.*

VERSE 22.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.—**Which returned out of the country** [territories or fields] **of Moab.** The description by which Ruth was commonly designated [cf. ii. 6]. (*Speaker's Com.*). As the same expression occurs at chap. iv. 3, in connexion with Naomi, it may be supposed that it became customary to speak of Naomi and Ruth as "the returned from Moab," or, as we should say popularly, "the returned Moabites" (*Lange*). Here the phrase applies to Ruth, as at ii. 6, but in iv. 3 to Naomi (*Keil*). Dr. Cassel translates, "And so Naomi was returned home, and Ruth, the Moabitess, her daughter-in-law, with her [who accompanied her] *after* [or on] *her departure* from the fields of Moab." And she desired to return with her [that is, with Naomi] with the whole heart; and they came from the land of Moab, etc. (*Syr.*). The Douay, following the Vulgate, trans., "So Naomi came with Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter-in-law, from the land of her sojourning" [from the land of her pilgrimage (*Wycliffe*)]. Aben Ezra thinks this to be understood of her returning at another time (*Gill*). **In the beginning of barley harvest.** The harvest as a whole commenced with the barley harvest (*Keil*). The beginning of spring, for the barley harvest began immediately after the passover, and that feast was held on the 15th of the month Nisan, which corresponded with our March (*A. Clarke*). They came to Bethlehem on that day in which the children of Israel began to mow the sheaf of barley which was to be waved before the Lord (*Targum*). The firstfruits of the barley harvest were, as we know, presented at the passover,

before which it was not lawful to begin the harvest (*Kitto*). In the next chapter (ver. 23) it is related that Ruth gleaned "until the end of barley and of *wheat harvest*." This book was therefore appointed by the ancient Hebrew Church to be read in the synagogues at the feast of weeks or Pentecost, when the wheat harvest began (*Wordsworth*) [cf. Intro., p. 1, par. 2]. **They came to Bethlehem in the beginning of the barley harvest.** Opens the way for the further course of the history (*Keil*). Explains the narrative in the next chapter. Keil questions whether the Bethlehem mentioned in connexion with Ibzan in Judges xii. 8—10 is the Bethlehem of the text, as Josephus affirms.

VERSE 22.

Theme.—THE WANDERER HOME AGAIN.

"I still had hopes, my long vexations past,
Here to return, and die at home at last."—*Goldsmith.*

"We leave
Our home in youth—no matter to what end—
Study, or strife, or pleasure, or what not;
And coming back in few short years, we find
All as we left it outside: . . .
But lift that latchet,—all is changed as doom."—*Bailey.*

So Naomi returned . . . . . and they came to Bethlehem in the beginning of the barley harvest.

This first chapter of the book of Ruth is in itself a perfect poem, as well as an epitome of human life and a parable of the soul's pilgrimage. The theme is that of "the wanderers." It has its prologue in the famine, and its epilogue in the return. Blow follows blow until the catastrophe is complete in the death of all who left the land of promise, save one. Then out of the dark night of sorrow hope is born and the return begins. Love lights up the picture, a love surpassing the ordinary and usual love of woman, and the chastened spirit bows at last, not to fate, but God. It is a poem complete in itself, rich with contrasting lights and shadows, and as Goethe has well said, "the loveliest thing in the shape of an epic or idyl which has come to us." Penned by inspiration, it has no equal and no second.

See here then, in conclusion, **I. The wanderer home again.** The most friendless of human beings has a country which he admires and extols (*Sydney Smith*). The greatest wanderer, some place dear above all else which he thinks of as *home*. Even the prodigal, sitting in the far country among the swine, remembers he has a "father's house," and turns longingly towards it. So with Naomi. [For the return, see on ver. 6, 7, pp. 32—36, and on ver. 19 and 21.] Note. (*a*) *The home ties the strongest, the home claims the most binding in human life.* True friendship as well as true religion centres there. Bethlehem was Naomi's proper place, and the whole scope of the narrative is to show that in leaving it she had gone out of the way of God's providences, as well as of His ordinances. (*b*) *Christian love begins its work at home.* Christian manhood shows its best there, and the circle of genial influence spreads and widens from that centre.

II. Home again in a fortunate way. Led of God; for she recognizes that the Lord had brought her home again (ver. 21). Naomi's extremity was God's opportunity. So with David (1 Sam. xxiii.). The statement of the text made in order to intimate that the help of God did not tarry long (*Lange*). Note. (*a*) *When God leads, it is not ours to linger.* Beware of by-paths and idle goings, keep straight on (*Bernard*). These came from Moab to Bethlehem; they had no idle vagaries that we read of. Old Naomi desired to see her country, and young Ruth was not wantonly disposed, but constantly kept her company (*Bernard*). (*b*) *They arrive safely, whom God conducts.* He neither slumbereth nor sleepeth. He led Israel through the wilderness for forty years, and landed them safely in Canaan at last. So always in lawful journeys, so especially in the heavenward one. Only let us see to it that we are of the same mind as Moses, "If Thy

presence go not with us, carry us not up hence" (Exod. xxxiii. 15), and all our journeyings must come to a prosperous issue.

III. Home again at a fortunate time. At the time of the barley harvest (see Crit. and Exeget. Notes). When there was at least gleaning to yield them sustenance, and the summer before them. In the beginning of the passover, saith the Chaldee Paraphrast, taking the fittest opportunity both for soul and body (*Trapp*). *Here we see the providence of God*, in ordering and disposing the journey of Naomi, to end it in the most convenient time. Had she come before harvest, she would have been straitened for means to maintain herself; if after harvest, Ruth had lost all those occasions which paved the way to her future advancement. God therefore, who ordered her going, concludes her journey in the beginning of harvest (*Fuller*). Note. *There is a fulness and fitness of time for every event* (*Macgowan*). The redemption from Egypt; the coming of Shiloh when the sceptre was departing from Judah; the soul's conversion; deliverance from affliction, etc. (*ibid*). God's time is always the best time.

IMPROVEMENT.—(*a*) When the heart is truly repentant, past error and sin, the humiliating experiences which have left their scars upon our inmost souls, may become to us blessed monitors urging us onward in the path that God has appointed. (*b*) Like the wounded hart, the bruised and troubled spirit turns homeward in its last extremity, if perchance it be only to die there.

"Tender and dear memories cluster around many a spot: none so sacred, so hallowed as this; for once again she is standing in the place consecrated by a thousand memories of the sacred dead. Returns like these ought to be significant of rest and privileges restored, as well as of new consecration to God; and this, although the past has been a barren past of worldly compromise and spiritual deadness."—*B.*

"There is a latter as well as a former rain in spiritual things; covenant mercies to be manifested in our declining years, as well as in the days when the kingdom of heaven was but newly entered. Our youth may have been given in part to folly, the more reason that old age should be consecrated unmistakably to God. And perhaps we, like Naomi, shall best find the Protector of our declining years in the Bethlehems of our youth. . . . Understand the meaning of this place to Naomi. No dreamy haze of mysticism rests upon it, no unreal sanctity. It is a place where the heart writes bitter things against itself, where the icy fountains of the great deep within break up, a place where the past seems a failure, and the future hopeless; and yet for all this it is a place where the winter time of the soul is ending, and the new summer life of prosperity begins to dawn."—*B.*

"The wandering of men from the perfect Home has brought with it degradation and scourging. Their return will be to find a Divine birthright restored in Christ."—*Pulsford.*

"Woe for my vine-clad home,
That it should ever be so dark to me,
With its bright threshold and its whispering tree,
That I should ever come,
Fearing the lonely echo of a tread
Beneath the roof-tree of my glorious dead!"
N. P. Willis.

"Perhaps this world of sorrows presents no sadder picture than that here brought before us—the return of a childless widow to the spot she had left a happy wife and mother."—*Macartney.*

"Thou needest not, then, sit down in weariness and hopelessness, whatever of earlier years thou hast lost, whatever grace thou hast forfeited; though thou hast been in a far country, far away in affections from him who loved thee; and wasting on his creatures,—nay, sacrificing on idol altars, with strange fire, the gifts which God gave thee that thou mightest be precious in His own sight."—*Pusey.*

"Landed property in Palestine is of very little value, except the possessor has the means of cultivating it; and as it was under the Jewish law unalienable, strangers could not purchase it. A landed proprietor might thus be reduced to beggary, and in times of general distress might long remain so. Such seems to have been the case with the family of Elimelech, and they were therefore forced to remain in Moab. Even upon the return of Naomi and Ruth, though the family property was still theirs, they were completely destitute. Their property was valueless, because they did not possess the means of cultivating it. This will serve to explain the peculiar position of Naomi and Ruth on their arrival in Bethlehem."—*Kitto.*

"Many a Swiss has sunk a martyr to his longing after home. The malady is commonly brought on by hearing the celebrated national air of the 'Ranz des Vaches,' sung at an unexpected moment, or when under the influence of dejected feelings. Overcome with the recollections which it awakens, he sheds tears; and is only to be consoled by the prospects of immediately returning to that home, his exile from which he deplores. If unable to accomplish this wish of his heart, he sinks into a profound melancholy, which

not unfrequently terminates in disease and death."—*Percy.*

"It was the custom, and still may be, at the coronation of our sovereigns, that every peer of the realm should come forward, and placing his hand upon the crown, swear that he would maintain due allegiance to it in his own realm and upon his own estate. So true hearts give themselves to God—in that which is truly theirs, at least, He shall reign supreme."—*B.*

CHAPTER II.

THE GLEANER IN THE HARVEST FIELD.

CONTENTS.—*Ruth, in her poverty, is led by seeming chance to glean in the field-portion of Boaz, Naomi's kinsman, and a great man in Bethlehem. Boaz, coming down from Bethlehem, is attracted by her, and makes inquiries concerning her. He afterwards shows her great kindness, and gives his reapers directions to favour her. She returns to Naomi to hear that he is near of kin to them, and to receive the approbation of her mother-in-law. She gleans in the field-portion of Boaz until the end of the harvest, dwelling with Naomi.*

VERSES 1—3.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.—**And Naomi had a kinsman.** According to Rabinical tradition, which is not well established however, Boaz was a nephew of Elimelech (*Keil*). Lyra saith Elimelech and Salmon—other Hebrews say Elimelech and Naason—were brethren. Some more probably hold that Elimelech was the son of Salmon's brother, and so his son the kinsman of Boaz once removed, for there was one nearer (*Trapp*). Not *the* kinsman who is meant, but *a* kinsman, as there were several (*Wright*). Boaz was only a מֹדָע (*Lange*); γνωριμος, a friend, a person known (LXX., *Wordsworth*). This not only explains a certain remoteness of Naomi from him, but it makes the piety, which, notwithstanding the distance (manifest also from iii. 12) of the relationship, perform what the narrative goes on to relate, more conspicuously great than it would appear if, according to an unfounded conjecture of Jewish expositors, he were held to be a son of Elimelech's brother (*Lange*). The Hebrew word is not the same as that rendered *kinsman* in ver. 20 and iii. 9—13. Literally, it means only an acquaintance, but it expresses more than we mean by that term. The man was not a very near relative, but one "known" to the family as belonging to it (*Lange*). **A mighty man of wealth** [a valiant hero] (*Lange*). Here it signifies a man of property (*Kiel*). These words are applied to Boaz in no other sense than to Gideon (Judges vi. 12), Jephthah (xi. 1), and others, and have no reference to his wealth and property (*Lange*). The phrase undoubtedly points to his valour and capacity in the field of battle (*Cox*). It is to be understood in the sense of "a leading man; a great man." Hence the Jewish tradition that Boaz is another name for Ibzan, the only judge connected with Bethlehem. He was a strong and able man in Israel in war and in peace (*Lange*). **And his name was Boaz.** Signifies strength (*Fuerst, Wordsworth, Wright*). Son of strength (*Lange, Cox*). Alacrity (*Gesen., Keil*). To be explained by reference to the name of one of the pillars erected by Solomon (*Lange, Wordsworth*). Cf. 1 Kings vii. 21, 2 Chron. iii. 27, in connexion with Solomon's temple. The signification *alacritas* would hardly be applicable to the pillar (*Lange*). The name Boaz found a contrast to that of Ruth's former husband, Mahlon, which signifies *weakness* (*Wordsworth*). The Chaldee reads "mighty in the law." *Boaz*, son of Salmon and Rachab the harlot (Matt. i. 5).

Ver. 2. **And glean ears.** Literally, glean among the ears. Let me gather (Sc., some ears) among those that are left lying in the field by the harvesters (*Lange*). The right to glean was a legal privilege of the poor in Israel (cf. Lev. xiii. 22, xix. 9, and Deut. xxiv. 19). But hard-hearted farmers and reapers threw obstacles in the way, and even forbade the gleaning altogether (*Keil*). Hence Ruth proposed to glean after him who should generously allow it (*ibid.*). Gleaning conceded, not as a matter of right, but as a favour (*Kitto*). **Of corn.** Corn is in Syriac the generic word for grain of any kind (*Steele and Terry*). **After him in whose sight I shall find grace.** Whoever he might be. Did not mean Boaz (A. *Clarke*). The owner had a right to nominate the persons who might glean after his reapers (*Steele and Terry*). In other words, the poor applied as Ruth did (ver. 7) for permission to glean. Some think, however, that she did this only as a foreigner.

Ver. 3. **And she went and came.** That is, she went out of the house where she was, and out of the city, and came into the field (*Gill*). According to the Midrash, however (*vide Jarci* and *Alshech, in loco.*), she marked the ways as she went, before she entered into the field, and then came back to the city, that she might not mistake the way (*ibid.*). **And gleaned in the field after the reapers.** Still regarded by the rural poor as one of their rights, though the decision has been against them in courts of law. The popular notion probably derived from Jewish customs (see *Kitto*). The law of Moses directed very liberal treatment of the poor at the seasons of harvest and ingathering. The corners of the field were not to be reaped; the

owner was not to glean his own field; and a sheaf accidentally left behind was not to be fetched away, but left for the poor (*Kitto*). As landowners were not subject to money taxes for the support of the poor, this claim was liberally construed by them (*Kitto*), at least by the better-disposed among them. **And her hap was to light.** More literally, "And her lot met her on the field of Boaz" (*Lange*). Literally, her hap happened (*Schaff. in Lange*), her chance chanced to hit upon the field (*Keil, Wordsworth*). **A part of the field belonging unto Boaz.** "The field-portion," *i.e.*, that part of the grain-fields about Bethlehem which belonged to Boaz (*Lange*). The grain-fields, unlike the vineyards, are not separated by any enclosure. The boundary between them is indicated by heaps of small stones, or sometimes by single upright stones, placed at intervals (*Lange*).

CHAPTER II.—VERSE 1.

HOMILIES AND OUTLINES.

***Theme.*—THE CLAIMS OF THE WEAK UPON THE STRONG.**

"Who gain their titles not by birth,
But win them by the lordlier worth
Of noble deeds,—true chivalry,
These men are God's nobility."—*B.*

"Howe'er it be, it seems to me
'Tis only noble to be good:
Kind hearts are more than coronets,
And simple faith than Norman blood."—*Tennyson.*

And Naomi had a kinsman [lit. acquaintance] *of her husband's, a mighty man of wealth* [a valiant hero (*Lange*)], etc.

The second chapter opens up a new act, as it were, in this beautiful and touching drama; poetry of the highest order, and not the less poetry because it is fact; for far more romantic things are recorded in history, than ever yet were created in novel or romance (*Cumming*). Mark, too, that thus early in the narrative, what is the key to the whole story is plainly pointed to, viz., redemption, salvation, help, from one near of kin, one of the same family and blood. No wonder the old Puritans saw a spiritual suggestiveness in the character of Boaz. "My Redeemer liveth" is "my Goel liveth," and the very word is applied to Boaz (chap. iv.). My strength and my Redeemer (Ps. ix. 14), in the Hebrew is my Boaz and my Goel (*Cumming*).

The text suggests as worthy consideration—

I. The relationship between the rich and the poor. Every branch of the tree is not a top branch (*Matt. Henry*). Must be and will be subordination, mutual dependence, and mutual responsibility, as long as the world lasts, or as long as the world is what it is. God wills that it should be so. He puts the rich and the poor side by side, and has linked them together a thousand times in this way. Beautiful when life repeats what is seen here, for the narrative goes on to show how Boaz came to respect Ruth and Naomi, first for kindred and then for virtue's sake. Note. (*a*) *A wealthy man may be a good and godly man*, ready to meet the responsibilities which come to him. Riches neither further nor hinder salvation, but as loved and trusted in. Not money, which is "the root of all evil," but the *love* of money. It is rare that religion and riches meet, yet Boaz was both rich and religious (*Macgowan*). Not many rich, etc. (*b*) *Poverty a thing not to be despised in and for itself.* The poor may be virtuous and attractive, as Ruth and Naomi evidently were. Boaz had "a poor relation," a most uncomfortable fact, as many respectable people know (*Braden*). And yet they neither begged of him nor thrust themselves unduly on his notice. They were an example to all the world of that quiet self-respect which feels the claim, and yet waits the opportunity when that claim is to be presented by circumstances and providential leadings rather than by themselves.

Note. (c) *It is not in the outward estate to alter blood and kindred*, or the claims which come from thence. Poor Naomi and rich Boaz were of the same stock after all. Joseph, though governor of Egypt, had poor Jacob for his father, and plain shepherds for his brethren (*Fuller*). Mark the frailty and vanity of worldly dignity. However parents provide for their posterity, these contrasts are common enough in family life. The posterity of the righteous are brought into poverty, that they set not their minds on temporal glory (*Topsell*).

II. The relationship between the strong and the weak. A link here between the two extremes. Boaz, whose very name signifies strength, a hero and a great man, perhaps a judge in Israel; and this poor bankrupt widow, forced to live upon another's gleanings. Naomi could say as does the Psalmist, "Thou hast put my kinsman far from me" (*Lange*). But Boaz had other qualities besides his strength. He shows himself morally brave in every relationship (*Lange*). All the claims which came to him in life are recognized and responded to, (1) as master; (2) as servant of God; (3) as a man of action; (4) as one not insensible to worth, hiding itself under the garb of poverty, he is an example of what is meant by the godly and righteous man. He stooped from his high estate, as Christ Himself humbled Himself to rescue the poor from their lot of ignominy and poverty; and he clothes them with his own dignity. His strength like the Saviour's strength—to compare human things with Divine—is shown in his works. Note. *Jesus is our near kinsman and Goel* (*Macgowan*), a mighty man of wealth in a natural and in a spiritual way (Col. i. 19, ii. 3).

IMPROVEMENT.—Learn from the whole narrative, as shadowed forth here, (1) The nobleness of strength nourishing weakness, true greatness recognizing the claims of those beneath it, where many would pass by and despise. "We that are strong," etc. (Rom. xv. 1). (2) Recognize the claims, which make the whole family of God as one. We are all of the same blood. Go back far enough, and you will find relationship. Remember the words of that noble Roman, received even then with tumultuous applause, "I am a man; nothing that concerns man can be a matter of indifference to me."

"The improvement of the ground is the most natural obtaining of riches; for it is our great mother's blessing, the earth's; but it is slow. And yet, when men of great wealth do stoop to husbandry, it multiplieth riches exceedingly."—*Lord Bacon.*

"It is not the having of wealth, but the having confidence in wealth; not the possessing it, but the relying on it, which makes rich men incapable of the kingdom of heaven: otherwise wealth well used is a great blessing, enabling the owner to do God more glory, the Church and commonwealth more good."—*Fuller.*

"Naomi, though a poor, contemptible widow, had rich relations whom yet she boasted not of, nor was burdensome to, nor expected anything from, when she returned to Bethlehem in distress. Those that have rich relations, while they themselves are poor, ought to know that it is the wise providence of God that makes the difference (in which we ought to acquiesce), and that to be proud of our relation to such is a great sin, and to trust to is a great folly."—*Matt. Henry.*

"How came it to pass, then, that a man so bold and generous and pious left Naomi unhelped and uncomforted in the time of her penury and grief? We cannot altogether tell. He may have been absent on military service when she returned from the field of Moab, and have only got leave of absence, as soldiers then commonly did, during harvest. He may only just have heard the tale of Naomi's sorrow when he met Ruth in the harvest-field."—*Cox.*

"One would suppose that to the proud heart of man anything would be preferable to beggary; but so inconsistent are its workings, that more are led to beggary by pride than poverty, as people imagine that a certain distinction attaches to dependence on relatives, or even on friends, while they regard the lower kinds of industry as disgraceful. . . . It would be well for all classes to remember that meanness is not humility; it is the miserable resource by which disappointed pride seeks to steal that distinction which has been denied it, and to avoid the humiliating and correcting lessons which Providence sends; it is the crouching to man of those who will not bow to God. In proportion as pure religion enters the soul, this hateful spirit leaves it, and a love of independence takes possession of it,—a love of independence arising not from pride, but from the genuine desire not to encroach on human kindness, not to forget the Divine declaration, "That if any would not work, neither should he eat."—*Macartney.*

"Behold therefore as in a glass the perfect image of temporal felicity, the father a king, the children beggars, the father honourable,

the son not worshipful, the predecessors the chiefest in authority, but the successors the meanest in calling: this made the fathers think that the world was like a sea, here a mighty wave, there a great downfall. Some thought it to be like ice, where a man can never stand sure, but the one will be breaking, or he be sliding; some like to trees whereof the tallest are soonest overturned; but all agree in this, that worldly felicity is miserable vanity; for our present wealth is like a pleasant summer which must needs come to an end, though all the world should strive to the contrary."—*Topsell.*

"Therefore make you friends of the unrighteous mammon, that when you shall have need they may receive you into their everlasting habitations. Distribute liberally, give plentifully, live peaceably, walk humbly; for the wealth of the world doth not always last, neither the crown from generation to generation."—*Topsell.*

"Let this confute such as having gotten a little more thick clay than the rest of their family, the getting of new wealth and honour makes them to lose their old eyes, so that they cannot see and discern their poor kindred afterwards. When Joseph was governor of Egypt, it is said that he knew his brethren, but his brethren knew not him; but now-a-days it happeneth clean contrary. If one of a family be advanced to great honour, it is likely that his kindred will know him, but he oftentimes comes to forget them. Few there be of the noble nature of the Lord Cromwell, who, sitting at dinner with the lords of the council, and chancing to see a poor man afar off which used to sweep the cells and the cloisters, called for the man, and told the lords, 'This man's father hath given me many a good meal, and he shall not lack as long as I live.'"—*Fuller.*

"Who knoweth whether God hath raised thee up, who art the best of thy kindred, to this very intent that thou mightest be the treasure and the storehouse to supply the want of others which are allied unto thee?"—*Fuller.*

"There are multitudes of men like the summer vines, which never grow even liqueous, but stretch out a thousand little hands to grasp the stronger shrubs; and if they cannot reach them they lie dishevelled in the grass, hoof-trodden, and beaten of every storm. . . . As yet the world will not understand that he governs whom love makes serviceable. The strong are few, the weak are many, and God appoints the strong to serve the weak, saying, 'We, then, that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification. For even Christ pleased not Himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproach thee fell on me.'"—*Beecher.*

"A Christianity which will not help those who are struggling from the bottom to the top of society needs another Christ to die for it."—*Ibid.*

"How seldom, friend, a good great man inherits
Honour and wealth, with all his worth and pains!
It seems a story from the world of spirits
When any man obtains that which he merits,
Or any merits that which he obtains.
For shame, my friend! renounce this idle strain!
What wouldst thou have a good great man obtain?
* * * * *
Goodness and greatness are not means, but ends.
Hath he not always treasures, always friends,
The great good man? Three treasures—love and light,
And calm thoughts, equable as infant's breath;
And three fast friends, more sure than day and night—
Himself, his Maker, and the angel Death?"
Coleridge.

"How blessed he
That feels not what affliction greatness yields!
Other than what he is he would not be,
Nor change his state with him that sceptre wields.
Thine, thine is that true life; that is to live,
To rest secure, and not rise up to grieve."
Daniel.

VERSE 2.

Theme.—HUMBLE TOIL, THE FIRST STEP TOWARDS AN AFTER RECOMPENCE.

"O woman! in our hours of ease
Uncertain, coy, and hard to please,
And variable as is the shade
By the light quivering aspen made;
When pain and anguish wring the brow,
A ministering angel thou!"—*Scott.*

"Oh, what makes woman lovely? virtue, faith,
And gentleness in suffering,—an endurance
Through scorn or trial,—these call beauty forth,
Give it the stamp celestial, and admit it
To sisterhood with angels!"—*Brent.*

And Ruth said . . . Let me now go into the fields, and glean. And she said unto her, Go, my daughter.

This is the first movement of the machine which brought such grand things about. From gleaning she arose to be ancestress to Jesus (*Macgowan*). This request led to the recompence; proved a step towards her highest preferment.

Note. (*a*) Great things often arise from very small beginnings. A restless night by Ahasuerus produced that great revolution in favour of the Jews (Esther vi.) (*Macgowan*). (*b*) High buildings are raised upon the lowest foundations (*ibid.*). Christ's Church was to be built upon the truth contained in Peter's confession (Matt. xvi. 16—18). So upon Ruth's fidelity the human nature of our Lord is, as it were, to be engrafted.

It reveals, **I. A truly filial spirit.** Gentle obedience, willing submission to Naomi. Her nativity of Moab; her behaviour that of an Israelite indeed—a true daughter of Abraham, though she springs from Lot (*Lawson*). Mark how her meek and beautiful spirit begins to show itself. She did not go of herself, obstinately and selfishly. She consulted her mother-in-law, and this was even more commendable than if it had been done to her natural parents. Possibly, too, she wished Naomi to enjoy the rest suitable to her time of life. Note. (*a*) *A wise, thoughtful, considerate spirit one of the true signs of grace.* This not always exhibited, especially where the pangs of want are felt. A parent's poverty at times the source of discontent (*Braden*). Many become hard, cold, cynical in reverses. Not so Ruth. (*b*) *These charities of the heart sweeten life* (*Lawson*). We have here a beautiful example of courtesy between children and parents, as in verse 4, between masters and servants.

II. A truly humble spirit. Mark the lowliness of her employment. She will work in the hot sun as a poor gleaner, and never murmur (*Braden*). Some way of earning a livelihood was a necessity. Ruth desirous of an honest though never so simple a calling (*Topsell*). Takes that which is nearest to hand. Will not depend upon Naomi, but would rather that Naomi in her old age should lean upon her. Will not even wait until, perhaps, Naomi's relatives, out of very shame, step in with succour and assistance. No! Like that one in the Gospel, she cannot dig, and to beg she is ashamed. But unlike that one, she is not above using every honest means to maintain herself and assist her mother. Note. *Female feelings are keener than those of men* (*Macgowan*). Contact with the rude, unfeeling world means more to them. Ruth must have shrunk with a woman's sensitiveness from the step. And yet she adapts herself to the new circumstances. She goes out to glean with the poor around her. So Paul: "I have learned in whatsoever state," etc. "I know both how to be abased," etc. (Phil. iv. 11, 12).

III. A truly noble spirit. The best natures show best when most tried, and they are lovelier in poverty than in wealth. Note. (*a*) *Brave toilers have always made the worst drudgery sublime* (*Braden*). Work is not degradation, and only mean spirits think it to be so. Paul laboured with his own hands as a tent maker. Not what I have, but what I do, is my kingdom (*Carlyle*). There is a perennial nobleness, and even sacredness, in work (*ibid.*). *"However humble, it exalts the man.* Labour is man's necessity . . . is man's glory (*Caleb Morris*), and brings its own reward. Especially so when an affection like Ruth's prompts us to it.

"Offices of love
Wrought for a parent lighten duty's labours."—*Sophocles.*

LESSONS. (1) Before honour is humility. (2) Great things come to pass by poor and unlikely beginnings (*Bernard*). (3) The way of our abasement may become, in God's providence, the way of our advancement.

Bernard on this:—

I. Honest hearts truly entertaining religion, do not forsake it or the godly for worldly wants.

II. Godly children hold themselves bound to be at the disposing of their parents.

III. Honest minds will stoop to base means, so they be honest, to relieve their wants in their poor estate. The truly religious will not live idle.

IV. Gleaning then, as now, was a lawful means for the poor to get food.
In whose sight I shall find favour.

V. The godly, in using lawful means to live, hope to find favour with one or other for their relief.
And she said unto her, Go, my daughter.

VI. Requests are to be granted of parents, unto children, when they be lawful and fit.

VIII. A meek and loving spirit giveth a meek and loving answer.

"What cold entertainment do they find at Bethlehem, even in the Church of God, for whose sake one forsook her country, the other her wealth, and both of them their welfare. . . . Is this the profit of your profession, which promises mountains of security, and pays a multitude of miseries? . . . A man that hath a thousand pounds laid beside him, and layeth it out upon a bargain, whereof he shall receive no profit in many years, but the date expireth and the day of receipt come, receiveth his own and many thousand pounds for his gain. . . . Even so with religion, it is a pearl for which we must sell both living and lands, and yet it is worth both, and many a thousand times more; if thou feel not the profit at first, tarry awhile, thou hast the promise and bond of the Lord of hosts."—*Topsell.*

"For this, then, she had left paternal house and land . . . But the love she cherishes makes everything easy to her. It not only gives utterance to good words, but it carries them into practice. She forgets everything in order now to remember her filial duty to Naomi, and Naomi accepts her offer. Until now she has only silently endured every expression of Ruth's self-sacrifice. She had indeed ceased to dissuade her from going with her, but she had also refrained from encouraging her. . . . The meekness with which she asks permission to encounter toil and misery overcomes in Naomi every other ulterior consideration. Such a request could no longer be silently accepted, nor could it be refused. Naomi has no other reward for Ruth's self-sacrificing disposition, than that she is ready to accept its effort for herself."—*Lange* (condensed).

"What prosperity had concealed, adversity brings to light. Nobleness that we never suspected, with powers that would have remained uncultured and unfruitful, have been manifested. They are like some grand mansion surrounded and hidden in summer time by large full-foliaged trees; the passer-by cannot discern the fine proportions and ornamental sculpture that make it 'a thing of beauty;' but when winter tears away with ruthless hand every leaf, until the trees stand clear and bare, then behold the magnificent handiwork appears in all its glory and perfection."—*Braden.*

"I do not hear Ruth stand upon the terms of her better education or wealthy parentage; but now that God had called her to want, she scorns not to lay her hand upon all homely services, and thinks it no disparagement to find her bread in other men's fields. There is no harder lesson to a generous mind, nor that more beseems it, than either to bear want or to prevent it. Base spirits give themselves over to idleness and misery, and because they are crossed will sullenly perish."—*Bishop Hall.*

"High spirits can more easily starve than stoop; Ruth was none of those. She does not tell her mother. She was never brought up to live upon crumbs. Though she was not brought up to it, she is brought down to it, and is not uneasy at it. Nay, it is her own motion, not her mother's injunction. Humility is one of the brightest ornaments of youth, and one of the best omens. Before Ruth's honour was this humility."—*Matt. Henry.*

Let this teach even those whose veins are washed with generous blood, and arteries quickened with noble spirits, in their prosperity, to furnish, qualify, and accommodate themselves with such gentile (gentle) arts and liberal mysteries as will be neither blemish nor burthen to their birth; that so, if hereafter God shall cast them into poverty, these arts may stand them in some stead towards their maintenance and relief."—*Fuller.*

"There are compensations even in this world, of which we little dream, and God sets one thing, and often a better thing, overagainst another in human life. Riches fly, but character is developed; we are compelled to work, and out of work spring our truest joys. Our life is paradoxical, but without contradictions; we are made the least, that we may become the greatest, and the way down is, with God as guide, always the road to exaltation."—*Braden.*

"Young persons should be cheerfully willing to bear fatigues and troubles for the sake of their aged parents, that they may enjoy such ease as the infirmities of age require. Let those who are in the vigour of age, if their parents are feeble, remember what their mothers endured for them in infancy or sickness, how they willingly suffered anxiety of mind, the want of sleep, and many fatigues of body, that their beloved offspring might enjoy pleasure, or be relieved from distress.

How selfish are the spirits of those young persons who grudge toil or expense for their parents in that time of life when they can enjoy little pleasure but what arises from beholding the affectionate attachment of their children."—*Lawson.*

"I am told that the Court of Common Pleas, which is not infallible, has decided that nobody has a right to glean. It was hitherto supposed to be a universal right; that prescript had made it law; but one of our courts has decided that it is not law, and that nobody has a right to glean. And therefore we have got what I suppose is thought politically a better substitute—the Poor Law, instead of the ancient usage of gleaning in the fields after the reapers."—*Dr. Cumming.*

"Labour is, and must be, the foundation of our earthly livelihood, must be the price of our natural, our bodily, our animal happiness. Labour in some shape or other is, in fact, the very foundation of everything that is good for man."—*Caleb Morris.*

"Do the duty which lies nearest thee, which thou knowest to be a duty. Thy second duty will already have become clearer. . . . Hence also our whole duty, which is to move, to work, in the right direction."—*Carlyle.*

"As frosts unlock the hard shells of seeds, and help the germ to get free, so trouble developes in men the germs of force, patience, and ingenuity, and in noble natures 'works the peaceable fruits of righteousness.' A gentle schoolmaster it is to those who are 'exercised thereby.' Tears, like rain-drops, have a thousand times fallen to the ground and come up in flowers."—*Beecher.*

VERSE 3.

Theme.—SEEMING CHANCES, REAL PROVIDENCES.

"Our indiscretion sometimes serves us well,
When our deep plots do pall; and that should teach us
There's a Divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them how we will."—*Shakespeare.*

"All Nature is but art, unknown to thee;
All chance, direction which thou canst not see;
All discord, harmony not understood;
All partial evil, universal good.
And spite of pride, in erring reason's spite,
One truth is clear, whatever is, is right."—*Pope.*

And she went and came, and gleaned in the field after the reapers, and her hap was to light, etc.

Inspiration speaks here after our human ways and methods of speech. Christ Himself did so in His wonderful parable of the Good Samaritan. "By chance," He says, "there came" (Luke x. 31). Note. *A revelation from God to man necessarily implies this condescension.* Just as the Word was made flesh, so the Divine thought, when it was revealed to holy men of old, must clothe itself with the limitation and imperfection which belong to speech. How else could we receive it—understand it? Elsewhere, however, the Scriptures teach us there is no such thing as chance. "Not a sparrow falleth," etc. And where men think they appeal to fortune, the hand of God is to be seen. "The lot is cast into the lap, but the disposing of it is of the Lord" (Prov. xvi. 33).

Observe, I. **That by what appear mere accidents, we may alight upon our best blessings** (*Braden*). Wandering at her will, going whithersoever she would, she was still treading in the path of destiny. Possibly she had neither choice nor desire, which could bias either to the right hand or to the left. At best, it was only a question as to where she would be allowed to glean that absorbed the mind (ver. 2, 7). Yet it was one of the critical moments of her life. So with ourselves. How many things have *happened*, about which we were strangely indifferent; yet their issues have proved unspeakably momentous (*Braden*). Note. *Human life itself is made up of little things, of small and seemingly unimportant events, upon which greater things depend.*

"Guard well the boon, 'tis trivial
In seeming only, and shall win
A dower of heaven for faithfulness,
The curse of hell, if there be sin."—*B.*

Observe, II., as following this—

That these seeming chances are real providences. If we could see the end as God does, we should see that every event is for the believer (*McCheyne*). With regard to Ruth, *this was hap or chance;* she knew not the fields of Boaz from those of another. With God it was providence. Outwardly, and as men speak, it was an accident, but mark to what the accident led! It brought her to that part of the field belonging to the man to whom, of all others, it was of the greatest importance she should be introduced. Note. (*a*) *That which we call chance, casualty, accident, "good luck," is included in the all things that work together for good* (Rom. viii. 28). What though it be a catastrophe or a crime!—there may be second causes and the action of human evil, but the great first cause is in all (*Spurgeon*).

Note. (*b*) *Those things which with us* are *accidental, are all the determinations of a holy Providence* (*Macgowan*). Ruth's purpose was to glean, God's purpose was to direct her into the way of meeting with Boaz. So always. In the eye of man, mere chance brought Jacob and Rachel together (Gen. xxix). So with Pharaoh's daughter going to bathe (Exod. ii. 5—10). None the less there was the Divine purpose being accomplished, which had respect to the future of Israel. So with the Syrian arrow drawn at a venture (1 Kings xxii. 34). God directed it. Note. (*c*) *The way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps* (Jer. x. 23). We go blindly, not knowing what a day or even an hour may bring forth. All is chance in one sense. We stumble upon the best things that come to us in life. It is all a surprise, and God has intended that it should be so. But then this is only the human side. Look deeper, and there is a plan, a purpose. Life unfolds itself to the wise man more and more as if it were a premeditated thing. There is a fitness, an appropriateness about all that happens, which speaks the Divine direction and control. Note. (*d*) *Providences to the righteous, are but the fulfilment of promises.*

Learn, **III. That God does direct and give success to the efforts of the right-minded.** David says, "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord" (Ps. xxxvii. 23). If so, the way and its issue alike must be well. Who can guide himself aright in this perplexing world? (*Braden*). Ignorance, confusion, the tangled thread of human affairs, everywhere apparent!

> "Mystery enshroudeth ever,
> Unknown shores on either side,
> And for ever through the darkness
> Flows the deep and troubled tide."—*B.*

So men have said as they travel onward down the stream of time. But faith has its answer amid these perplexities of human life,—"This God is our God for ever and ever, and *He will be our guide* even unto death."

Note. (*a*) *That this Divine guidance, however apparent, does not set aside individual responsibility.* The angel hands were laid upon Lot when he left Sodom, but he himself must yield to them—the human will working with the Divine will—if his salvation is to be secured. He might have cast off the angel hands, and perished with his sons-in-law, who mocked alike at the threatened danger and the offered guidance (Gen. xix. 14—16). Note. (*b*) "*I being in the way, the Lord led me*" (Gen. xxiv. 27), *the principle upon which God deals with men.*

So it was with Ruth. Mark (1) *God's blessing met her in the way of humble toil.* Lange gives as a more literal translation, "And her lot met her in the field of Boaz." Her destiny was decided there—humble gleaner as she was, she found favour with the man upon whom everything depended. So always. God's blessing can come to us in the cornfield, or in the workshop, or in the counting house. And He Himself can be with us there. "Not man's manifold labours," says Dr. Pusey, "but his manifold cares, hinder the presence of God. Labour ordained by God, and wrought for and in God, invites God's fuller presence." Note. *A principle in this choice of the humble who are to be exalted* [cf. Luke i. 48—53]. He

who chose a gleaner to be the ancestress of David, of Christ, chose the fisherman, and the tax-gatherer, and the tent maker, to confound the wisdom and the greatness of the world (1 Cor. i. 18—28).

Mark (2) *God's blessing met her in the way of a self-denying as well as a self-appointed duty.* Her reward found her where her love led her. This one of the main lessons of the history, a lesson pointed out by the pen of inspiration itself [cf. ver. 12].

Tyng on this (ver. 2—6) condensed :—

Theme.—THE GLEANER.

God brings His children by ways they know not. The manifestation of His plans gradual. No accident in our lives. How ample was the portion He had provided for Ruth, a kinsman prepared to protect, to sustain, and to exalt her —a mighty man of wealth. But as yet she had no personal knowledge of him —no means of knowing the gracious purposes of God regarding her. So God has prepared an all-sufficient and waiting Saviour for the poor and perishing sinner, a Saviour able to meet his wants, his dangers, his future need. But the perishing one knows nothing of Him. The way in which God is pleased to lead us to Jesus illustrated in the method of Ruth's introduction to her rich kinsman.

I. The first step is to reduce her to the deepest necessity. In great poverty, and with no apparent means of relief, Ruth proposes to glean. The very necessity brought out a proof of her excellency. So God brings the soul to an experience of utter want. Looks round in vain for relief. His conscious necessity urges him to come as a beggar. And it is when he can say, "I am willing to be the lowest of the low, if the Saviour will receive me," that the day of his salvation draws nigh.

II. The next step is to take away all feeling of rebellious pride in this state of want. Sinful pride, a most common attendant on earthly distress—a very different feeling from self-respect. Ruth had great self-respect, and yet she was not ashamed to be poor. Willing to glean—to do anything. So the sinner must be made to feel his deep unworthiness, his complete nothingness, etc.

III. The next step is one of gracious providence to bring her, as it were by accident, to an unexpected introduction to her rich kinsman. God had disposed and prepared her way before her ; and leads her to the very place where He designs to bless her. Her coming seemingly accidental, but far enough from accident in reality. So the gracious providence of God is often manifested in bringing poor, perishing souls under the ministry of the Word ! This the point to which everything else is tending, and to which everything else is subordinate.

IV. The next step in Ruth's history is the peculiar crisis at which she came into the field. The time of a gracious visit from the master, etc.

Bernard on this (condensed) :—

And she went and came and gleaned. She craved leave to go, and when it was granted, she accordingly went. (1) *Honest motions and intentions to well doing are to be put into practice*, else they are worth nothing. Paul had a mind to visit the brethren, and he did so ; the prodigal son had a purpose to return home, etc. If motions be good, it is good to put them into execution, and that speedily . . . . and not to lose the fruit of good thoughts. (2) *Whom necessity moveth, and confidence in God encourageth, they fear no danger.* Trusting in God, and being urged of necessity to use honest means to live, she feared no peril, though in those days, every one did what they listed (Judg. xviii., xxi. 25). When men have faith in God, when the duty of their calling warranteth them, they grow courageous and bold, and put on a resolution without fear.

And her hap was. When things fall out beside a man's purpose, or otherwise than was intended, and whereof a man is ignorant before the thing come to pass, then it is counted hap, or luck, or as the heathen used to speak, fortune. (1) *It is not unlawful to speak according to men thus : It happened, it chanced, it was my*

luck; so that we understand thereby that which happened beyond our purpose and expectation, but yet guided by God's hand and providence . . . . always excepting in clear cases, where the apparent hand of God is seen; for thus offended the Philistines (1 Sam. vi. 6—9). (2) *God doth so govern men's actions, as things fall out beyond expectation, and as they were to be wished.* See it in the success of Abraham's servant sent to fetch a wife for Isaac (Gen. xxiv.); in Elijah coming to the poor widow of Sarepta in a most fit hour, etc. This should make us to rely upon God's providence as Abraham did (Gen. xxiv. 7). (3) *God will prosperously direct the well-minded which use honest means to relieve themselves.*

"She went out, not knowing whither she went; taking either the right hand, or the left, scarcely being able to assign a reason why she preferred the one to the other."—*Toller.*

"The misery or happiness of our life is often derived from accidents that appear quite trivial. Time and chance happeneth to all men, and no man can tell what consequences the slightest accident may leave. Connections, happy or pernicious, riches or poverty, life or death, may be the consequences of a walk or a visit intended for the amusement of a single hour."—*Lawson.*

"As the star (Matt. ii.) guided the wise men to Judea, to Bethlehem, to the inn, to the stable, to the manger; so the rays and beams of God's providence conducted Ruth, that, of all grounds within the compass and confines, within the bounds and borders of Bethlehem, she lighted on the field of Boaz."—*Fuller.*

"We take our steps without thought of consequences, and imagine that we are following out our own arranged designs, when all the while we are unconsciously fulfilling the purposes of a sovereign Providence."—*Braden.*

"How comes the Holy Spirit to use this word—a profane term which deserves to be banished out of the mouths of all Christians? Are not all things ordered by God's immediate providence, without which 'a sparrow lighteth not on the ground'? Is not that sentence most true, 'God stretcheth from end to end strongly, and disposeth all things sweetly: strongly, Lord, for Thee; sweetly, Lord, for me'? So St. Bernard. Or was the providence of God solely confined to His people of Israel, that so Ruth, being a stranger of Moab, must be left to the adventure of hazard? How comes the Holy Spirit to use this word 'hap'?"—*Fuller.*

"Things are said to 'happen,' not in respect of God, but in respect of us; because oftentimes they come to pass, not only without our purpose and forecast, but even against our intentions and determinations. It is lawful therefore in a sober sense to use these expressions. 'It chanced,' or 'It fortuned' (Luke x. 31). Nor can any just exception be taken against those words in the collect, 'Through all changes and chances of this mortal life,' provided always that in our forms of speech we dream not of any heathen chance. It is observed that τυχή is not used in all the works of Homer; but sure St. Austin, in the first of his 'Retractations,' complaineth that he had too often used the word *fortuna*, and therefore, in the pagans' sense thereof, we ought to abstain from it."—*Ibid.*

"Scripture speaks of all things as being what they appear to be: were it otherwise, its language would be incomprehensible to us. We would not talk to a savage of chemical affinities, in endeavouring to explain to him the uses of salt or soap; we would speak of their apparent properties, and thus be enabled to carry his mind with us. Were God to speak to us of things as they are, that is, as He sees them, how utterly unintelligible would such address to us be! Let us mark attentively the course of events connected with, and depending on, this *chance* event—the birth of Obed, and through him of David—the promises made to the man after God's own heart fulfilled by the appearance in that family of God manifest in the flesh; . . . . and let us cast from us as unscriptural and absurd the theology which would teach us that great events are indeed ordered by God, but that smaller matters are beneath His notice, and unworthy of it. While the greatest events are made to spring from minute causes, the Lord of the universe must be recognised alike in the smallest as in the vastest of His works, whether of providence or of creation. 'The very hairs of your head are all numbered.'"—*Macartney.*

"The story describes it as a fortunate incident, a curious coincidence; that is, it speaks in a natural human manner about it, because, when unable to trace the immediate action of a Divine hand, we are inclined to speak of chance rather than law, and of fortune rather than God. But we believe that it was by a supernatural guidance she was led there that day. . . . It was 'her hap, but it was God's will."—*Braden.*

"Things do not *happen*—casualty, accident, chance, are mere words used to conceal our ignorance. Look deep enough, and you will find law, order, and purpose in the most chaotic circumstances; listen attentively, and you will hear the sound of a Divine harmony beneath the discordant and confusing noises of our present existence."—*Thomas Jones.*

"People say, 'How fortunate it is that things have turned out just as they have—that I was prepared for this!' As if God did not arrange the whole! One might as well say, 'How fortunate it is that I have a neck beneath my head, and shoulders under my neck!'"—*Beecher.*

"*Doubt* Providence—and what the better

are you? You have the liability to accident, and nothing to control it, nothing to throw light upon it, nor to which you yourself may fly. You are the creature of chance, driven to and fro as a fallen leaf, and when you cry, there is none greater than you to help you."—*Wardlaw MeAll.*

"This circumstance was with Ruth merely accidental, and not the result of choice and contrivance; but it was the effect of the Lord's secret direction, in whose providence great events depend upon apparently trivial incidents."—*Scott.*

"Accidit accidens vel eventus. By mere chance in respect of Ruth, who, being a stranger, knew not whose field it was; but by a sweet providence of God, who led her hither by the hand, as it were, for her present encouragement and future advancement."—*Trapp.*

"Little do we know, when we go forth in the morning, what God means to do with us ere night. There is a providence that attends on us in all our ways, and guides us insensibly to His own ends; that Divine hand leads Ruth blindfold to the field of Boaz."—*Bishop Hall.*

"Blindfolded and alone I stand,
With unknown thresholds on each hand;
The darkness deepens as I grope,
Afraid to fear, afraid to hope:
Yet this one thing I learn to know
Each day more surely as I go,
That doors are open'd, ways are made,
Burdens are lifted, or are laid,
By some great law unseen and still,
Unfathom'd purpose to fulfil
Not as I will."—*Helen Hunt.*

"I do not deny that these things happened in the natural order. I say I am grateful for what happened; and look back at the past not without awe. In great grief and danger, may be, I have had timely rescue. Under great suffering I have met with supreme consolation. When the trial has seemed almost too hard for me, it has ended, and our darkness has been lightened. Ut vivo et valeo—si valeo. I know by whose permission this is, and would you forbid me to be thankful? To be thankful for my life; to be thankful for my children; to be thankful for the daily bread which has been granted to me, and the temptation from which I have been rescued? As I think of the past and its bitter trials, I bow my head in thanks and awe. I wanted succour, and I found it. I fell on evil times, and good friends pitied and helped me."—*Thackeray.*

VERSES 4—7.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.—Ver. 4. **And behold Boaz came.** Not only to see the progress of the work, but also to take part in the entertainment provided for his labourers (*Wright*). **The Lord** [*Jehovah*] **be with you.** The first time this emphatic expression occurs in Scripture (*Scott*). Cf. Judges vi. 12. The same salutation as that addressed by the angel to Gideon (*Speaker's Com.*). The salutation one almost universally hears between the peasants in the fields are identical with those used by Boaz and his reapers (*Dr. Porter*). The *Targum* is, "May the word of the Lord be your help."

Ver. 5. **Then said Boaz** [*And Boaz said*] **unto his servant that was set over the reapers** ἀγροχόμος; the land steward (*Josephus*). נער is not only used in its primary significance as a boy, but also in its more general meaning as a servant (*Wright*). **Whose damsel is this?** τίνος ἡ νεᾶνις ἄυτη (*LXX.*). Cujus est hace puella (*Vulgate*). What nation is this girl? (*Targum.*) What is the news of this girl? (*Syr.*) What is the state of this maiden? (*Arab.*) It seems that Boaz found her resting in the tent where the reapers took their meals (cf. ver. 7—14).

Ver. 6. **It is the Moabitish maiden.** Or she is a Moabitish maiden, who came back with Naomi, etc. (*Lange*). Thus taken, the answer does not assume that Boaz is acquainted with the return of Naomi. The E.V. may, however, be justified by taking הַשָּׁבָה as a participle (cf. *Ges.* iii. 2, *a*) (*ibid.*) [cf. on i. 22]. Boaz had heard of her, and had been much interested in her history (ver. 11), but he had not seen her before, so that this was their first meeting (*Steele and Terry.*)

Ver. 7. **And she said.** And she has said (asked). Pray I will glean [*i.e.*, pray allow her to glean] (*Keil*). **And gather among the sheaves** [Greek, handfuls]. The Israelites appear generally to have made up their corn into sheaves (*Kitto*), cf. Gen. xxxviii. 7; Lev. xxiii. 10—15; Job xxiv. 10, etc. In the most ancient times, however, the corn was plucked up by the roots, and in Egypt at this day, barley and dourra are so gathered. Wheat as well as barley does not grow half so high as in England (*Russell*). **So she came, and hath continued.** And has come and stays (here) from morning till now (*Keil*). And she has gleaned from morning even to resting (*Syr.*). The LXX. renders it freely: "And she came and stood from morning till evening, and rested not *even* a little in the field." **That she tarried a little in the house.** Thus her sitting in the house is but for a little (*Lange*); *i.e.*, she has been sitting in the house as you see her now, only for a short time (*Wright*). Boaz, it would seem, had remarked Ruth sitting in the cottage or tent in which the reapers were accustomed to rest themselves and to take their meals (*ibid.*). Wordsworth thinks it hardly probable, that she would have entered a tent of the reapers, and translates rather as to her stay in the house, **that is little**; *i.e.*, she spares herself no time to go home for rest and refreshment. Her

sitting in the house that is little (*Keil*). Evident from this answer, (1) that Boaz did not prohibit any poor person from gleaning in the fields; (2) that Ruth asked permission of the overseer, and availed herself of that permission, with untiring zeal from the first thing in the morning; (3) that her history was well known to the overseer, and also to Boaz, although Boaz sees her now for the first time (*ibid.*).

VERSE 4.

Theme.—The Right Relationship between Masters and Servants.

"It is a kind of good deed to say well;
And yet words are not deeds."—*Shakespeare.*

"Large-hearted souls that turn with love
To all beneath and One above;
To heaven they constant bow the knee,
And prove them God's nobility."—*B.*

And behold Boaz came from Bethlehem, and said unto the reapers, The Lord [Jehovah] *be with you, etc.*

Now that Ruth is in the field, the plans of Divine Providence are not completed until Boaz has been led there. Note. (*a*) *Providence is the execution of the Divine decree, always infallible and well-timed* (*Macgowan*). How opportunely it brought Pharaoh's daughter to the infant Moses; Ahasuerus to have that part of his chronicles read which concerned Mordecai (Esther vi. 1, 2); Pharaoh to dream when Joseph is to be delivered from prison. A similar guidance to be recognized in connexion with the text. [See on ver. 3.] Note. (*b*) *God's thoughts are above ours, and He so orders our actions as we, if we had known, should have wished* (*Bishop Hall*). Looking back, how often do we see that He has not only given us the thing that is best for for us, but brought about events even as we ourselves could have desired.

Remark, **I. On the character of a righteous man as illustrated here.** Boaz seen in the text as (1) *diligent in business*, (2) *fervent in spirit*. Rich but religious, a rare bird (*Trapp*).

Mark *his industry*. Did not sit at home, and leave his affairs to his servants. There is an overseer [a land steward—*Josephus*] but everything is not left to him. Not one of those who are ashamed to be seen in the fields with his labourers. No! he goes to inspect, to oversee, to direct, to look well after his business affairs. *An example* (*a*) *to masters.* "No eye like the master's." If a man would thrive, let him do his business himself (*Toller*). Careful personal superintendence not only necessary, but beneficial—work performed more rapidly—vast waste prevented, etc. (*Braden*). (*b*) *To ministers.* Oportet Episcopum conscionantem mori (*Bishop Jewell*).

Again mark *his benevolence and kindness to a stranger* (ver. 8—16), as well as *the courtesy and piety expressed here.* The salutations are earnest prayers. Like every good man, he carries a devout atmosphere about with him wherever he goes, into the cornfield as well as into the closet. Note. (*a*) *Real goodness will display itself in every relationship of life.* Naaman, although a heathen, appears to have showed kindness to his servant (2 Kings v. 1—3). Our faith barren, unless it make itself seen in the character and the life. If a man cannot be a Christian in the place where he is, he cannot be a Christian anywhere (*Beecher*). Note. (*b*) *Good men will pray for a blessing upon those around them, especially those of their own household.* The Lord be with you! This address, with the response, is one of the earliest examples of family prayer (*Wordsworth*).

Remark, **II. On the right relationship between master and servants, as illustrated here.** They must be very depraved men who are not faithful servants and sincere friends to such masters as Boaz. "Even publicans," says our Lord, "love those who love them" (*Lawson*). Note. *Good masters generally make good servants.* Treat men with kindness and courtesy, and they will return it, as here. The just demeanour of their master, refined by humility, controlled these (*Lange*).

Observe, (1) *The mutual respect and good-will between master and servant* expressed in these salutations. The picture a very beautiful one, the master praying a blessing upon his servants, the servants in return praying a blessing upon their master. Can a pious mind read these godly salutations without wishing for a return of those simple, primitive times? (*Adam Clarke.*) Note. (*a*) *Christians are to bless, and curse not.* Religion requires rather than prohibits these salutations [cf. Matt. x. 12; John xx. 26; Luke i. 28; Ps. cxxix. 7, 8, etc.], so that our greeting be sincere. It is to be neither that of an Absalom (2 Sam. xx. 10) nor a Judas, but free from guile, and without hypocrisy. (*b*) *A sign of an ungenerous nature to be outvied with courtesy* (*Fuller*). Charity hopeth all things, and if they [whom we salute] be not sons of peace, our peace returneth to us (*Trapp*). Those passages, as 2 Kings iv. 29, and Luke x. 4, which the Anabaptists formerly quoted against Christians saluting each other, to be explained by the haste of the messenger, etc. (*Bernard*).

Observe, (2) *The harmony between employer and employed.* The secret of it to be found in the joint dependence upon the Divine providence expressed. "The Lord," etc. Living faith in God is the best bond between master and workman; preventing a wrongful use of power on the one side, and presumptous insubordination on the other (*Lange*). Note. *Only a true Christian can make either the highest type of master or of man.* Until men are inspired by God's love . . . until they have confidence in each other as religious men, there will be neither mutual sincere courtesies, nor any profound trust in each other's dealings (*Braden*).

This happy relationship expressed in the text *useful*, if only *by way of contrast.* Class alienation our country's greatest curse (*Braden*); little of genial unity between employers and employed; the breach between capital and labour seriously widening (*ibid.*). Where is the cure? Laws, however wisely framed, can never altogether amend relationships which depend upon mutual esteem and good-will. The cure must go deeper than the realm of law. Is to be found alone where Christianity promises it, in the regeneration of human nature itself.

IMPROVEMENT.—(1) Let us learn to use (*a*) courteous salutations as expressions of a sincere good-will (*M. Henry*). (*b*) Pious ejaculations, lifting up our hearts to God for His favour (*ibid.*) upon ourselves, our friends, households, servants, etc.

(2) See how grace humbles the heart, teaches men to be sociable—is the very cement of society. It makes mighty men of wealth not above their fellows (*Macgowan*). Among the Moslems, the salutation . . . . a sign of their brotherhood in religion, and *their actual equality before God* (*Kitto*). We may go to the East to learn how the poor may be treated with courtesy, and be continually reminded, in every passing form of speech, of their natural and religious brotherhood (*ibid.*).

"It appears safe to conclude that the inn of Joseph and Mary was the inn of Jeremiah; and if it was the inn of Jeremiah, it was also beyond doubt the house of Chimham, and consequently it was presumably the house which had once been that of David and Ruth.

"Every hint afforded by the Bible narrative as to local fact and local colour helps to prove that the birthplace of David, and that the khan, or residence of Jesse, in which the two men were born, stood here in Bethlehem, on the very ridge now crowned by the Church of the Holy Nativity. . . . As the shape of the ridge, and its relation to Jerusalem imply, the spot on which the house of hospitality would stand must have been a little below the town, at the junction of roads coming up the great valleys . . . on a spot lying below the gates and above the fields; in fact, the very ground on which the inn of Jesus stood, and on which the church and convent of the Grotto stand.

"Here, then, where by all analogies we should seek it, the Bible tells us that the house of Boaz stood on the green slopes some paces below the town, between the gates and the cornfields. Ruth, living in the town with Naomi, had to go down into these fields as the gleaners go down now (iii. 3), the descent from the hill on which the city is built to the fields being sharp."—*Hepworth Dixon's "Holy Land."*

"So a king, in Homer, is represented as among his reapers, with his sceptre in his hand, and cheerful. Pliny relates it, as a saying of the ancients, that the eye of the master is the most fruitful thing in the field; and Aristotle reports, that a Persian being asked what fattened a horse most replied, The

eye of the master; and an African being asked what was the best dung for land, answered, The steps of the master."—*Gill.*

"Say to a Turk according to custom, 'May your morning be propitious!' he replies, 'May you be the pledge of God!' Ask a Turk. 'Is your health good?' he answers, 'Glory be to God!' Salute him, as you pass him rapidly in travelling, he exclaims, 'To God I commend you!' and is answered, 'May God be with you!'"—*Hartley.*

"The pious, affectionate language interchanged between him and his reapers, and which appears to have been familiar to them, shows that there were many godly persons in Israel, notwithstanding national defections; and it beautifully illustrates the genuine effect of true religion in producing affability in superiors, and respect and affection in inferiors, and mutual unaffected goodwill in all. It is lamentably true that such language as this is seldom heard in our fields, while the bounty of Paradise is gathered in, but frequently the reverse; yea, whatever can inflame the passions and corrupt the morals; so that a stranger, who should be occasionally present, would be apt to form a very different opinion of the religion of England, than Ruth did of that of Israel, from the conversation and conduct of Boaz and his reapers."—*Scott.*

"'If a civil word or two will make a man happy,' said a French king, 'he must be wretched indeed who will not give them to him.'"—*Dictionary of Illustrations.*

"Observe, courteous and loving salutations beseem Christians. Indeed, our Saviour (Matt. x.) forbade His disciples to salute any in the way; but His meaning was that they should not lag or delay, whereby to be hindered from the service wherein they were employed. And St. John, in his second Epistle, saith, that to some we must not say 'God speed,' lest we be made 'partakers of their evil deeds;' but that is meant of notorious sinners, which have discovered their impious intents. It is commonly said that the smallpox is not infectious until it be broken out, so that before the time one may safely converse, eat, drink, lie with them; but after the pox is broken out it is very dangerous; so we may safely salute and exchange discourse with the most wicked sinners, whiles yet they smother and conceal their bad designs; but when once they declare and express them, then it is dangerous to have any further familiarity with them."—*Fuller.*

"Piety not only stands with humanity and civil courtesy, but also exacteth and requireth it (Matt. xii.; 1 Pet. iii. 8; Luke x. 5). God hath His ethics, and commandeth good manners as well as good conscience. Affability and courtesy is the way to win others; men's minds are taken with it, as passengers' eyes are with fair flowers in the springtide; whereas a harsh, sullen, sour, churlish conversation is very distasteful to all, galleth the best (witness David, 1 Sam. xxv.), and openeth bad men's mouths to speak evil of religion."—*Trapp.*

"This was a real prayer from the mouth of Boaz. It is too common with men to say 'God be with you,' when God is not in their thoughts. The name of God is profaned when it is used without consideration. It is reported of the great philosopher Boyle, that he never mentioned the name of God without making a visible pause in his discourse. . . . All good things are requested in this prayer, *The Lord be with thee.* God's presence and favour will satisfy our souls, will supply every want, will turn sorrow into joy, and the shadow of death into the morning. But without God's presence and blessing, the richest confluence of sublunary blessing will leave us wretched and miserable, poor and blind and naked."—*Lawson.*

"These salutations are well paraphrased by Dr. A. Clarke:—'May God be with you to preserve you from accidents, and strengthen you to accomplish your work,' 'May God bless thee with the increase of the field, and grace to use His bounty to the glory of the Giver.' They impress us as beautiful indications of the pious and simple courtesy of the ancient Hebrew people. Such salutations, both between equals and superiors and inferiors, are still common in the East, but a Moslem will not thus knowingly hail one of another religion."—*Steele and Terry.*

"Men must strive to understand each other's position, to look upon it with broader sympathies, to learn that the interest of master and servants cannot be separated. For this class alienation is our country's greatest curse, and must prove utterly disastrous to the prosperity of its commerce and the growth of its social well-being."—*Braden.*

"Where a pious and brave spirit like that of Boaz pervades the community, social questions and crises do not arise; for external laws can never restrain the inward cravings of the natural man. But where the landed proprietor, in his relations to his people, is governed by other principles than those of self-interest, and cares also for their moral and religious development; where, further, the labourer understands that an increase in wages is not necessarily an increase of peace and happiness; where, in a word, the consciousness of an omnipresent God regulates the uprightness and care of the one, and the honesty and devotion of the other; there, no artificial solutions of conflicts between capital and labour will be required. Boaz lives in God, and therefore knows what duties of faith and love are obligatory upon him."—*Lange.*

"I think it looks as if Boaz and his servants were really on friendly terms, and had one another's interests at heart; he was pleased to see them cheerful and happy, and they to see him prosperous; he piously wished a blessing upon their labours, and they devoutly returned a benediction upon his substance."—*Fuller.*

"The master of the great household of the world gives us an example of the case, whose eye is in every corner of his large possession. Not civility only, but religion, binds us to

good husbandry. We are all stewards, and what account can we give to our Master, if we never look after our estate? I doubt whether Boaz had been so rich if he had not been so frugal, yet was he not more thrifty than religious. He comes not to his reapers but with a blessing in his mouth, 'The Lord be with you,' as one that knew if he were with them, and not the Lord, his presence could avail nothing. All the business of the family speeds the better for the master's benediction. Those affairs are likely to succeed, that take their beginning at God."—*Bishop Hall.*

VERSES 5—7.

Theme.—ATTENTION TO THE STRANGER AT THE GATE.

"The fragrant sheaves of the wheat
Made the air above them sweet;
Sweeter and more divine
Was the scent of the scattered grain,
That the reaper's hand let fall
To be gathered again
By the hand of the gleaner:
Sweetest, divinest of all,
Was the humble deed of thine,
And the meekness of thy demeanour."—*Longfellow.*

Then said Boaz . . . Whose damsel is this?
And the servant that was set over the reapers answered, etc.
And she said, I pray you [thee] *let me glean, etc.*

A finer picture of rural harvest-scenes is nowhere extant. We hear, as it were, the rustling of the reapers' sickles (*Lange*). The interest, however, here, as always, centres in the human elements of the picture—most of all, in Ruth pursuing her humble and lonely task, a stranger in a strange land. Possibly the poet's words are only too true, where he speaks of

"The sad heart of Ruth, when sick for home,
She stood in tears amid the alien corn.—*Keats*

Rural life not that paradisiacal thing Virgil contrasts so enthusiastically with the luxuriant life of Rome (*Lange*). Even in Israel a gleaner, conspicuous by her foreign garb, may have been in danger of insult (ver. 9). Only when a pious and Godfearing spirit rules in the heart of proprietor and dependants, is it good to live amid the quiet scenes and rewardful toil of the country (*Lange*). Only then "the chaste dwelling preserves virtue [casta pudicitiam servat domus] (*ibid.*). The text gives a fine example of the best aspects of rural life, where religion comes in to soften and refine its usual asperities.

Observe, **I. The prompt attention as well as careful although courteous bearing towards a stranger** on the part of the master. (1) *Prompt attention.* The Hebrew law held a master, in some measure, accountable for the stranger at his gate [cf. Exod. xx.10]. Nehemiah recognized this responsibility (Neh. xiii. 16—22). So does Boaz in the text. He does not wait for information, but asks at once, Whose damsel is this? An example (*a*) *to masters and heads of households*, which followed, will assuredly bring its own reward, as here. "Be not forgetful," says the Apostle, "to entertain strangers; for thereby some have entertained angels unawares" (Heb. xiii. 2). (*b*) *To ministers.* One of the complaints of modern worshippers is, that they come and go from the sanctuary unheeded; no one making inquiries concerning them or their welfare; no one doing for years what this fine old Hebrew gentleman did at once, and in a spirit which lifted it above all possibility of being misunderstood. Even Eli, although mistaken, was not indifferent to the stranger in the sanctuary (1 Sam. i. 1—18). Note. "*No man careth for my soul,*" *a terrible inditement, if true, against any Christian church or community.*

(2) *Carefulness.* Boaz, in doing good, evidently would know the persons and recipients; who they are, whence they came, whether they were worthy or not. A modern tendency to be lax on all these, and kindred points, rebuked here. True that God sends His rain upon the just and the unjust, that the wicked are not to be left to perish in times of want; but also true, that the Church has a special duty towards its own [cf. Gal. vi. 10; Luke xxiv. 47, etc.]. Charity is to *begin* at home, as well as to begin with the worthy, though it is not to remain there. Note. *Strict inquiry should be made respecting those damsels who glean in the field of gospel ordinances. Whose are they, God's or Satan's?* (*Macgowan.*)

Observe, **II. The ready and unhesitating answer** on the part of the steward. Mark, (1) *He answers without hesitation;* can give a ready account of those whom he has suffered to glean in his master's fields. Evidently he has performed his duty as overseer diligently and faithfully, as one who may at any moment be called to an account by the master. An example (*a*) *to servants,* (*b*) *to church officers, elders, deacons, ministers, etc.* Note. Church stewards ought to be capable of giving an account of those they suffer to partake of her bounty (*Macgowan*).

(2) *He makes no attempt at concealment.* Had done nothing but what he knew the master would approve. His kindness to the damsel had not made him unfaithful to his master; nor did his faithfulness to his master make him surly to the poor (*Macartney*).

(3) *He is just and accurate in the account he gives.* He neither misrepresents nor overstates,—a model steward. "Faithful in that which is least," in that which simply concerns a poor gleaner, he is likely to be "faithful also in much." A contrast to the unjust steward mentioned by our Lord (Luke xvi.).

(4) *He displays a kindly and considerate spirit.* Little did he think that this damsel was his intended mistress (*Macgowan*). But, like master, like servant. He had caught some touch of the generous and considerate spirit which belonged to Boaz; he knew his master's benignity, and imitated it. Honourable of him, that he at once recommends Ruth by praising her diligence (*Lange*). Note. *The well-disposed will praise virtue wherever they see it.*

Observe, **III. That which made this attention and kindness on the part of master and servant of value** in the case of Ruth. (1) *She was a stranger,* one of an alien race, a Moabitish damsel. Kindness, sympathy, slight attentions of especial value to such. [Example, Mungo Park and the African women.] This gave her, too, a special right to gather the gleanings of the harvest (Lev. xix. 9, 10). Even the law pointed out the stranger as one not to be forgotten and overlooked by the benevolent—how much more then does the gospel! Ruth's position illustrates that of many to-day, just coming into similar relationships with the Church of God. Note. *All are Moabites by birth, who glean in the gospel fields* (*Macgowan*).

(2) *She was a proselyte*—had left all for Naomi and Naomi's God. This evidently procured her favour in Israel, and ought to have done so. Note. *Such deserve the deepest sympathy and the warmest welcome from the Church of Christ.* Only those who have passed through the same, or a kindred ordeal, can understand what it means, this tearing oneself away from old associations and affections, for the sake of a new principle, possibly to be met with coldness and even distrust and prejudice.

(3) *She was humble and modest in her behaviour.* Not merely the natural charm and grace of her presence, not merely her modest and reserved bearing, not merely the fact that she was a foreigner, makes her conspicuous; the narrative reveals other and more sterling qualities: (*a*) *gratitude* (ver. 10), (*b*) *humility.* Did not glean until she had asked leave: "I pray you let me," etc. (ver. 7). Little did she think that this rich field was to become her own. Note. *In all this she is a type of the true convert.* What mean thoughts have such of themselves when they come first to glean in the gospel fields! (*Macgowan.*)

They cannot think they have a right to the handfuls, much less to the sheaves, less still that the field is their own; and least of all, that the unsearchable riches of the owner are theirs (*ibid.*).

(4) *She was diligent and unsparing of herself.* Gleaning not a dignified employment, but she evidently did it thoroughly and heartily. Note. (*a*) *There should be fidelity, heartiness, thoroughness, sincerity, honest truthfulness, in the minutest things* (*Beecher*). [Example, Phidias; see extracts.]

Mark her constancy, too, in industry. Not merely diligent at first, as many, but all day long. *A type of those who are really and truly Christ's.* We are His if we continue in well-doing, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end (Heb. iii. 14). Ruth continued in her labour "from the morning till now," till night, till the end of the harvest (*Fuller*). Oh that we could imitate her constancy in the working out of our salvation! not only to be industrious in the morning, when we first enter into Christianity, but to hold out and to persevere even to the end (*ibid.*).

Again, observe on the other hand, as taught here, *that rest is a necessity* with the most urgent and diligent. Allowed and blessed of heaven (Ps. cxxvii. 2). True Christians, however, feel like Ruth, that they must be up and doing; "*her resting in the house is but for a little*" [see Crit. and Exeg. Notes]. They feel emphatically that to-day is for work; to-morrow, the to-morrow of eternity for rest.

Braden on this (ver. 5—16) condensed:—

Theme.—INTRODUCTION TO A FUTURE WIFE.

Divine Providence led Ruth into that particular harvest-field, and under the same mysterious guidance, Boaz directs his steps thither. Judging from the subsequent history, may we not say, that God designed this meeting in order that the two might become husband and wife? The truth of the proverb (not always applicable, however,) that marriages are made in heaven, illustrated here.

1. Notice here *Boaz's introduction to his future wife.* As he enters the field, he notices a stranger,—his curiosity aroused, little dreaming what consequences would follow. May have been attracted by the beauty of her face, by her industry in the field, or her Moabitish dress. Inquires "Whose damsel is this?" (ver. 5.) The reply shows how well known, and equally appreciated is her behaviour to her mother-in-law. Evidently the universal theme of conversation. Good deeds done modestly need no trumpeter, they are speedily recognised.

(2) Notice *the first conversation between this future husband and wife.* Ruth, absorbed in her work, heard not Boaz speaking to her (ver. 8, 9). Note how sensitive, thoughtful, and delicate his offer. He makes provision that she shall not only be unmolested, but refreshed (ver. 9). Seems a little thing to do, but character is shown more in small than great deeds. The needy often deeply touched by trivial gifts. Ruth deeply moved. "Why have I found grace?" etc. (ver. 10). Has no vanity, no pride; she knows how to receive a gift. Does not regard this generosity as a right, nor accept it with grim sullenness. Evidently Naomi has told the story of her daughter-in-law's fidelity, love, and self-sacrifice. An Israelite, like Boaz, devotedly attached to Bethlehem, appreciates the intensity of affection which could so unreservedly forsake the home of childhood and the associations of youth,—a rare instance of high virtue (ver. 12). Did not, however, let his admiration rest in fine utterances of praise, but gives substantial proof of its sincerity in gifts. His sympathy and benevolence unlike that described by James ii. 15, 16. His kindness exquisitely delicate. He will not offend her sense of independence, so practises a little harmless deception. She shall gather much, and go home fancying her abundance is the result of her own industry. The secret of judicious giving is to help the poor in all possible ways, and not destroy the proud and noble virtue of self-reliance. Indiscriminate charity has produced the pauperism, and lazy beggardom under which society so grievously suffers.

(3) Observe *how Ruth won his affection.* Not by art, stratagem, nor, perhaps, even by her personal beauty. But by her virtues, by her faithful attachment to a poor, distressed mother-in-law, by her steady industry, by her sweet humility, and above all, by her love to the God of Israel. In all this Ruth an example to English maidens. Unfortunately, many seek husbands, if husbands do not seek them—attempt to catch them by meretricious guile and superficial qualities.

(4) Notice *where Ruth won the affection of Boaz.* In the harvest-field. Engaged in common and humble tasks. A hint as to the best place in which to estimate a woman's virtue: not in the ball-room or the music-hall, not in the excitement of a holiday or of the social party, not on the Sunday and in company, but in the quiet routine of her ordinary life. This followed, and there would be fewer mistakes made in matrimonial alliances. Look for a wife, not amongst those who gad about in ostentatious grandeur, nor amongst those whose chief amusement is gossip and flirtation; but seek one whose gentle, unassuming manners, industrious habits, and filial affection, will ensure a happy future, and make a real home. Beware of marrying a slothful woman, or one who speaks against her parents, or one who does not lovingly perform all home duties. Essentially true that a good daughter makes a good wife.

"Thus the Saviour comes to visit His earthly field, and calls the servants to account for their charge. He walks amidst the candlesticks, and holds the stars in His right hand. His ministers watch for souls as they who must give an account. Not the poorest stranger is unnoticed, or forgotten by Him. It is a blessed thought. The Saviour sees. The poor, the lonely, the neglected, in all their needs and sorrows, are marked by His eye. The poor widow's two mites were not forgotten. The Syro-Phœnician was not sent away. Bartimeus was not despised. Lazarus was not rejected. Jesus may be considered as asking His ministers continually, of one and another in their flock, 'Who is that?' And they should be able to reply. He will call them at last to an account for all, and for every soul entrusted to them they must answer."—*Tyng.*

"To create and maintain a familiar and intimate acquaintance with the members of the flock committed to him is a most important instrument of usefulness to a faithful pastor."—*Ibid.*

"The first thing required in stewards is, 'that a man be found faithful' to his employer; but it is also a good property in a steward to be humane towards his lord's servants, and towards all that have any dependence upon him for employment or favours. The man that was set over the reapers of Boaz had already shown such favour to Ruth as it was the part of a steward to do, and by his answer to his master's question concerning her, he was a means of procuring her such favour, as a steward could not confer without permission. Words fitly spoken may do much good, and indicate good sense and good disposition in the speaker."—*Lawson.*

"Let masters, therefore, in choosing the stewards to be set above the rest, take such as are qualified, like Jethro's description of inferior judges (Exod. xviii. 21), 'men of courage, fearing God, dealing truly, hating covetousness.' And however they privilege them to be above the rest of their servants, yet let them make them to know their duty and their distance to their masters, lest that come to pass which Solomon foretelleth (Prov. xxix. 21): 'He that bringeth up his servant delicately in his youth will make him like his son at the last.' Let stewards not be like that unjust one in the Gospel, who made his master's debtors write down fifty measures of wheat, and fourscore measures of oil, when both severally should have been a hundred; but let them carefully discharge their conscience in that office wherein they are placed; whilst inferior servants, that are under their command, must neither grieve nor grudge to obey them, nor envy at their honour. But let this comfort those underlings, that if they be wronged by these stewards, their appeal lies open from them to their master, who, if good, will no doubt redress their grievances."—*Fuller.*

"No sooner is she come into the field, but the reapers are friendly to her. No sooner is Boaz come into the field, but he invites her to more bounty than she could have desired. Now God begins to repay into her bosom, her love and duty to her mother-in-law. Reverence, and loving respect to parents, never yet went away unrecompensed; God will surely raise up friends amongst strangers, to those that have been dutiful at home."—*Bishop Hall.*

"Had a sister Moabitess met her in this employment, and inquired what it was that could urge her to it, she would have answered her as Elger von Hohenstein did his brother, who, finding him away from his castle and its life of ease, engaged in taking care of the poor, exclaimed, 'Alas, my brother! what are you doing? What distress compels you to this?' 'Sir brother mine,' was the answer, 'distress compels me not; but the love of Christ my Lord constrains me.'"—*Lange.*

"Observe, that what happened to Ruth is analogous to what happened to us. For she was a stranger, and had fallen into the

extremest distress; but Boaz, when he saw her, neither despised her poverty, nor contemned the lowliness of her family. So Christ took up the Church, and chose the stranger, who lacked the most necessary possessions, for His bride. But as Ruth would never have attained to such a union had she not previously left her parents and given up people, home, and kindred, so the Church also does not become dear and deserving in the eyes of her Bridegroom until she has left her ancestral (heathen) morals and customs."—*Chrysostom.*

"Even the greatest, in respect of God, is but a gleaner. God, He is the Master of the harvest; all gifts and graces, they are His, in an infinite measure; and every godly man, more or less, gleans from Him. Abraham gleaned a great glean of faith; Moses, of meekness; Joshua, of valour; Samson, of strength; Solomon, of wealth and wisdom; St. Paul, of knowledge and the like. Now, if we would be glad at our hearts that the Lord would give us free leave and liberty for to glean graces out of His harvest, let us not grudge and repine that poor people glean a little grain from our plenty. To conclude: when God hath multiplied our 'five loaves,' that is, when of our little seed He hath given us a great deal of increase, let poor people, like Ruth in the text, be the 'twelve baskets' which may take up the fragments of gleanings which are left."—*Fuller.*

"The plume-like waving of the autumn corn,
By soft winds to a dreamy motion fanned,
Still bring me back thine image, O forlorn,
Yet not forsaken, Ruth! I see thee stand,
Lone 'midst the gladness of the harvest-band,
Lone as a wood-bird on the ocean's foam,
Fallen in its weariness. Thy fatherland
Smiles far away! Yet to thy sense of home,
That finest, purest, which can recognise
Home in affection's glance, for ever true,
Beats thy calm heart; and if thy gentle eyes
Gleam tremulous through tears, 'tis not to rue
Those words immortal in their deep love's tone,
Thy people and thy God shall be mine own."
Mrs. Hemans.

"It is related that when Phidias, the great sculptor, who carved statues for one of the temples in antiquity, was labouring with minute fidelity upon the hair on the back of the head of one of the historic figures, which was to be elevated from the pavement to the very apex of the building, or placed along the frieze, some one expostulated with him, saying, 'Why do you take such great pains with the hair? it is never to be seen.' His simple reply was, 'The gods will see it.' So he laboured thoroughly in the minutest things, not for the eyes of men, but for the eyes of the gods."—*Beecher.*

VERSES 8—12.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.—Ver. 8. **Then said Boaz** [and Boaz said]. **Hearest thou not?** Dost thou hear (*i.e.*, thou hearest, dost thou not? interrogatio. blande affirmat) (*Keil*). Lit. Hast thou not heard? (in the perfect,) the effect of the use of this tense being to mark the permission to glean as irrevocably fixed, not subject to uncertainty or change (*Speakers' Commentary*). **My daughter.** A kind phrase, indicating at the same time Boaz's mature age (*ibid.*). He recognizes the existence of a certain relationship, the benefit of which is due to Ruth (*Lange*). The good report of the overseer (ver. 7) would strengthen any claim he felt Ruth had upon him through Naomi. Spoke with fatherly kindness therefore (*Keil*). **Neither go from hence,** and go not away from here (*Keil*). He has called her to him where he stands by the reapers (*Lange*). **Abide here.** Lit. cleave (*Wordsworth*). κολλᾶθητι (LXX.). **Fast by my maidens.** And keep so to my maidens (*Keil*). The gleaner who was allowed to approach nearest the reapers had the best opportunity (*Lange*). Boaz seems to have had women-servants employed. Also perhaps other gleaners in the field, whom he would include among his maidens (*Steele and Terry*). Robinson saw nearly two hundred reapers and gleaners at work in one field (ii. 394). Gleaning was often almost as important as reaping, since the latter was done in a very slovenly manner.

Ver. 9. **Let thine eyes.** Thine eyes (directed) upon the field which they reap, go behind them (*i.e.*, behind the maidens, who probably tied up the sheaves whilst the men-servants cut the corn (*Keil*). The maidens were probably only gleaners, for the verb *they do reap* is in the masculine, *while after* them is in the feminine (*Speakers' Commentary*). In the absence of fences, Ruth might go unlicensed on another's possessions; hence the charge to keep near his maidens (*Steele and Terry*). **Have I not charged the young men?** Such precautions are not out of place at this day. The reapers are gathered from all parts of the country, and largely from the ruder class, and being far from home, throw off all restraint, and give licence to their tongues, if nothing more (*Dr. Thomson*). **That they should not touch** [molest] **thee.** That is, either to hinder, or to injure. **Go unto the vessels.** Doubtless a special indulgence to a gleaner. The harvest-field was often at a distance from springs or wells (*Steele and Terry*).

Ver. 10. **She fell on her face.** With Oriental reverence (*Speakers' Commentary*). [Cf. Gen. xxxiii. 3; 1 Sam. xxv. 23, and 2 Sam. i. 2.] **Bowed herself to the ground.** Towards the earth (*Wright*). **Why have I found grace?** [Cf. 2 Sam. vii. 18, 19, and Luke i. 43.] **A stranger.**

She is so unassuming as to deem this very fact an enhancement of his kindness (*Lange*). Keil trans. "Why have I found favour in thine eyes, that thou regardest me, who am only a stranger?"

Ver. 11. **It hath been fully shown me.** Everything has been told me (*Keil*). Boaz could have derived his knowledge only from narrations proceeding from Naomi (*Lange*). **All that thou hast done.** So Christ knows all concerning those who would be recipients of His favour (ver. 30—36; John i. 48). **And how thou hast left.** Hast therefore done what God commanded Abraham to do (Gen. xii. 1) (*Keil*). **Thy father and thy mother.** [Cf. Matt. x. 37, xix. 29.] One of the plain signs of discipleship. **Unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore.** Lit. Which thou knewest not the day before yesterday (*Wright*). Here also is a figure of the Gentile Church coming to Christ; see Ps. xlv. 11—17 (*Wordsworth*).

Ver. 12. **The Lord** [Jehovah]. **And a full reward.** A complete reward (*Lange*). And let thy reward be perfect (*Keil*). Recalling Gen. xv. 1 (*Keil*). **Under whose wings.** A figure of speech derived from Deut. xxxii. 11 (*Wordsworth*). Jehovah represented as an eagle there, spreading abroad her wings over her young. Others think the allusion is to the mercy seat overshadowed by the outstretched wings of the cherubim. Cf. also Ps. xci. 4, xxxvi. 8, lvii. 2; and our Saviour's words, Matt. xxiii. 27. In these words we see the genuine piety of a true Israelite (*Keil, Groser*). The Syriac renders this verse *quod sensum*, thus, "May the Lord, the God of Israel, reward thee, and give thee thy reward, to whom thou hast come, that He may protect thee under His wings." Very similarly the Arabic (*Wright*).

VERSES 8, 9.

Theme.—CARE FOR THE STRANGER AT THE GATE.

"With countless sheaves of golden grain
The joyful reapers strew the plain."—*Anon.*

"She was a phantom of delight
When first she gleamed upon my sight;
A lovely apparition, sent
To be a moment's ornament.
* * * * *
I saw her upon nearer view,
A spirit, yet a woman too;
Her household motions light and free,
And steps of virgin liberty;
A countenance in which did meet
Sweet records, promises as sweet;
A creature not too bright or good
For human nature's daily food."—*Wordsworth.*

Then said Boaz . . . Hearest thou not, my daughter? Go not, etc. Have I not charged the young men? etc. And when thou art athirst, etc.

Grace humbles even mighty men of wealth to utter the law of kindness to the poor and needy (*Macgowan*). With Boaz, Naomi's nearness of kin, and Ruth's worth, were both at work to produce this favourable treatment. He recognises the latter (ver. 11, 12) even more plainly than he does the former; for to good men virtue is even more precious than kinship, and goodness will make itself friends always, as here. His good-will shown at once.

(1) *He has a care to be understood.* Hearing is often without taking heed (*Macgowan*). Age and experience may fittingly claim a special attention from the young. Note. *This was a favourite method of appeal on the part of the Great Teacher.* (1) Commands attention. (2) Claims a special and thoughtful consideration for what follows. [Cf. Num. xii. 6; Isa. i. 2; Jer. v. 21; Matt. xxvii. 13, vii. 26; Luke viii. 8, etc.]

(2) *He has a care to put her in her right position as toward himself.* Calls her daughter; a respectful, even affectionate, yet delicate form of salutation, most appropriate under the circumstances. Rich men who have poor relations are not always found saluting them in this way. The same noble yet thoughtful spirit is to be seen in every word he utters.

I. See the delicacy of his help. (1) *Does not despise her labour*, respects it, forwards it, helps it,—the sign of a truly noble spirit. He calls her near, and makes her gleaning more productive. So the Saviour, signalized His approach to

His disciples, on a memorable occasion, by a miraculous draught of fishes. He entered into their toils, and increased its returns so much, that the net brake, etc. (Luke v. 6; cf. also John xxi. 6).

(2) *He managed to supply her wants without taking away her sense of independence.* A hint to the benevolent, too often forgotten. Note. *Charity itself may be and is an evil, if it pauperize the poor.* Depend upon it, the best way is to help them to help themselves. The benevolence of Boaz a model in this: (*a*) practical; (*b*) unostentatious. Made the obligation as light as possible, and apparently scarce of a pecuniary nature (*Macartney*).

II. See its genuineness. Is not anxious to get rid of the burden, or to share it with another; rather would take it all upon himself, be it much or little. "Go not to glean in another field . . . abide here fast by my maidens." As if he had said, "Depend upon me and mine." A right royal, large-hearted spirit; he has at least enough and to spare for her. Note. (*a*) *It is so he begins to show himself already, her Goel, her kinsman.* Mercy is never miserly. Boaz in all this, his giving and his doing, an illustration of the way Christ receives (*a*) strangers, (*b*) gleaners in the gospel fields, (*c*) young converts. His provisions are ample—there is enough and to spare; His fields are wide—there is no need to wander from them. Nay, He is even jealous at the thought of our looking elsewhere. Note. (*b*) *In wandering, a snare is more likely to be met with than a blessing* (*Macgowan*).

III. See its thoroughness. He offers not only help, but protection, and provision for all her wants. (1) *He provides for her society.* "Abide fast by my maidens." Hence we gather it is most decent for women to associate with those of their own sex (*Fuller*). The disciples wondered that Christ talked with a woman (John iv. 27), showing hereby that it was not His ordinary course to converse alone with one of another sex (*ibid*).

(2) *He provides for her safety.* "Have I not charged the young men?" etc. Boaz evidently felt that his servants had need of the caution, and that they would stand in awe of his word. Note. (*a*) *Servile natures are most prone to wrong strangers.* (*b*) *It is the part of a good master, not only to do no harm himself, but also to take care that his servants do none* (*Fuller*). This instinct to protect the young and the defenceless from wrong and harm, belongs to every truly noble nature, and the want of it, is a certain sign of baseness and churlishness of spirit. See how it finds its noblest expression in the pathetic words of Christ, "How often would I have gathered," etc. He would that all men should come unto Him and find safety, salvation, life eternal.

(3) *He provides for her refreshment.* "When thou art athirst," etc. Matthew Henry thinks the water was drawn from the famous well of Bethlehem, which was by the gate, the water of which David longed for (2 Sam. xxiii. 16). Wherever it came from, there it was (*a*) already provided; (*b*) freely offered; [cf. Rev. xxii. 17]; (*c*) to be partaken of whenever thirsty [cf. Isa. li. 1]. Note. (*a*) *Thus generosity a faint type of the liberality of Christ* (John iv. 10). (*b*) *A work of mercy and love may be shown in a small matter* (*Bernard*).

"Mothers and nurses are very careful, tenderly to handle infants when they are but newly born. So Ruth: Christ was newly formed in her, a young convert, a fresh proselyte; and therefore Boaz useth her with all kindness, both in words and works: 'Hearest thou, my daughter?'"—*Fuller.*

"Christ knows the heart of a 'stranger'—a stranger to the work of grace, yet a seeker after it—and He bids such stay by Him, among His people, and in His pastures: 'Go not to glean,' etc. He shows not the fulness of His love all at once, lest the trembling soul should be overpowered; but by His gentleness He attracts her love, showing more of the kindness of His heart in acts for her than by any personal expressions of tenderness: 'Have I not charged?' etc. Christ forgets not the sensitiveness of the newborn spirit; vigorous faith shall not boast itself against budding hope, neither shall the strength of manhood urge beyond its power the feebleness of childhood; rather growing experience shall lend a helping hand to new-born desires; and freely as we have received, we must freely give."—*The Believer Filled with Christ's Strength.*

"You have with you, and around you, many

who are striving to walk in the strait and narrow way which leadeth unto life. Their light shines before you; their daily walk encourages and animates you. *Keep fast by them.* You have a faithful and simple ministry of the gospel. You have a pure and blessed form of public worship. Every benefit and advantage for you is there. You have the simple and appropriate ordinances of the Lord's house. Jesus has promised to meet you there. *It will be good for you to be found in no other field.*"—*Tyng.*

"According to a proverb of the fathers, benevolence is one of the pillars upon which the world rests. 'The world,' said they, 'is sustained by virtue of three things—the law, Divine worship, and active benevolence.' . . . To do a person a favour is to act beneficently towards him, without any hope or desire of return, and may be practised in two cases—to oblige a person to whom we are not under obligation, and to accommodate or oblige a person, with more trouble to ourselves and more gain to him than he deserves. The mercy which is mentioned in the Bible is that which is given freely and without desert upon the part of one to whom it is granted; for instance, the benevolence of God is called mercy, because we are in debt to God, and He owes us nothing."—*Talmud.*

"Rabbi Jochanan has said that it is as pleasing in God's sight if we are kind and hospitable to strangers, as if we rise up early to study His law; because the former is in fact putting His law into practice."—*Ibid.*

"The pilgrim and the stranger, who through the day
Holds over the desert his trackless way,
Where the terrible sands no shade have known,
No sound of life save the camel's moan,
Hears at last, through the mercy of Allah to all,
From his tent-door, at evening, the Bedouin's call:
'Whoever thou art, whose need is great,
In the name of God, the Compassionate
And Merciful One, for thee I wait!'

For gifts in His name, of food and rest,
The tents of Islam of God are blest.
Thou who hast faith in the Christ above,
Shall the Koran teach thee the Law of Love?
O Christian! open thy heart and door—
Cry, east and west, to the wandering poor,
'Whoever thou art, whose need is great,
In the name of Christ, the Compassionate
And Merciful One, for thee I wait!'"

Whittier.

"In this wonderful universe around us, when the full play of life is seen, it is all a giving, the ocean to the clouds, and the clouds to the earth, and the earth to the rivers, and the rivers to the ocean back again; the sun sends its radiant beams and benign influences among the stars, and the planets reflect them around, each in his lesser sphere; the ground yields its sustenance to the trees, and the trees their fruit and foliage to man; the flowers send their perfumes abroad to the winds of heaven, nor is there a cessation of these sweet interchanges until that moment when activity ceases, and the stagnation of decay begins. The penurious spirit, the spirit which has but to withhold, is an anomaly, a blot in the whole realm of nature. Nothing is made for itself, and it is a sign of death rather than life when the creature begins to circumscribe its influences, and ceases or refuses to give."—*B.*

"Nature says it is 'good,' but grace says it is '*better* to give.' Nature knows something of that lavishness which bestows, because it must bestow, which feels and knows that withholding is to poverty; but grace teaches a higher thing, that 'giving to the poor is lending to the Lord.'"—*B.*

"One day a philosopher inquired of Rabbi Akiba, 'If your God loves the poor, why does He not support them?' 'God allows the poor to be with us ever,' responded Akiba, 'that the opportunities for doing good may never fail.'"—*Talmud.*

"I have noticed in travelling, that when one with a face wrinkled and worn walks into the car, there is not a seat to spare for her; and I have noticed that if one comes in who is young and blooming, of radiant eye and most comely face, there is not one in the car who has not a seat for her. Beauty wins its way. And if it be so in the outward life, which is but a mere shadow of the inward, how much more is it so, in the inward! And nothing is more beautiful, than duty performed under adverse circumstances."—*Beecher.*

"He [Boaz] begged she would keep to his grounds during the harvest, and not, in the hope of bettering herself on the one hand, or in the fear of presuming on the other, remove to the lands of any other person. And it will be observed how, in the absence of enclosures, he gives her the means of knowing his grounds, by telling her to adhere to the company in which she already finds herself, that of his own labourers, among whom she might rely upon being perfectly safe. We gather that the persons employed in the field were menservants, women-servants, and day-labourers, the women seemingly being chiefly employed, in ministering to the wants of the men engaged in active toil, and in performing some of the lighter labours. One of the most important provisions of the harvest field was water, often necessarily brought from some distance, and placed so as to be kept cool."—*Kitto.*

"Had he been actuated by the spirit of modern sentimentality, he would probably have been ashamed of her. He would have offered her a piece of money, and sent her away, that it might not become known that this Moabitish beggar is his relative. He would at all events, not have allowed her to go on gleaning. But according to the ancient delicate and religious view, he cannot act thus. Nothing has been asked of him; consequently he has no right to wound the self-respect of others. The privilege of gleaning belongs of right to

the widow and the stranger. It is not well that she needs it; but needing it, he cannot hinder her from using it. Even while he admits her relationship, he can only support her in the right, and enlarge its advantages. And this is what he does. Ruth had modestly, gleaned at a distance from the reapers and binders. He calls her nearer, and says, 'Go not to glean in another field.' In these words he acknowledges the first degree of the interest to which his relationship binds him."—*Lange.*

"Young men, in any station of life, are often, by their rudeness or licentiousness, the terror of modest young women; but Boaz would allow of no indecency in words or conversation amongst his servants. A good man will not only refrain from doing or speaking evil, but will restrain all that depend on him from licentious or rude behaviour. Paul will have none to be admitted to the office of elders in the church, who do not rule well their own houses. Not that it is a duty incumbent on elders only, to keep their families in due subjection, but because elders must be exemplary in everything worthy of praise. We are all accountable for those evils which it was in our power to have prevented.—*Lawson.*

"'Tis a little thing
To give a cup of water; yet its draught
Of cool refreshment, drained by fevered lips,
May give a shock of pleasure to the frame
More exquisite than when nectarian juices
Renew the life of joy in happiest hours."
Talfourd.

"The Rabbis particularly insist that we are not to confine the exercise of charity to our own people, for the law of Moses inculcates kindness and hospitality towards the stranger within our gates."—*Talmud.*

VERSE 10.

Theme.—THE LOWLY ATTITUDE OF A GRATEFUL HEART.

"When gratitude o'erflows the swelling heart,
And breathes in free and uncorrupted praise
For benefits received, propitious Heaven
Takes such acknowledgment as fragrant incense,
And doubles all its blessings."—*Lillo.*

Then she fell on her face. . . . Why have I found grace in thine eyes . . . seeing I am a stranger?

Outward courtesies should be done in humility of heart, not out of mere compliment or affectation, or an apish imitation of others. Our finest feelings, like the flowers, open and display themselves almost insensibly and unconsciously. If Boaz proves himself the ideal of a true gentleman, Ruth displays no less delicacy and refinement of feeling throughout the whole interview.

Observe, **I. What deep and touching humility is expressed here.** Modesty, unostentatious unassuming worth and humility, are always becoming in the young—more especially so when they are recipients of favours, as here. She cast down her eyes, not looking impudently upon him; she bowed to the ground (*Bernard*), wondering at his great kindness, though it was but permission to glean and to drink water out of the vessels (ver. 9). Neither regarded this as her right, nor an insult to her independence.

Again, **II. What affectionate gratitude is here.** How thankfully doth Ruth take these small favours from Boaz! Perhaps some rich jewel in Moab would not have been so welcome (*Bishop Hall*). Her words were few and to the point, a rare grace in man or woman. Note. (*a*) *Gratitude in the recipient is as beautiful as generosity in the benefactor.* It requires as much grace to receive a favour becomingly, as to bestow one. (*b*) *The humble are always disposed to be thankful.* They think everything better than they deserve.

We have a rebuke here. (1) To such as receive favours, and will not acknowledge them, like the nine lepers (Luke xvii. 18). (2) To such as scornfully refuse favours, and will not be beholden to others. Note. (*c*) *Ingratitude is a soul-sin, a stoppage to all favours* (*Bernard*).

Again, **III. What confessions of unworthiness are here.** Humble souls

wonder at kindnesses, however small, rather than make light of them and disparage the givers; look into themselves and their own unworthiness, rather than remember anything that is of worth in them, or might win them attention. *So with Ruth.* Her mind is fixed upon that which might have hindered, viz., the fact that she is a stranger, rather than upon anything else. *So with the pardoned sinner.* He feels himself the object of such grace and boundless mercy, that his own unworthiness and guilt are more apparent to him than ever (*Tyng*).

Lastly, **IV. What consciousness of need is here.** She knows what she is, a "stranger," but does not attempt to disguise the fact, and all that it means, either from herself or Boaz. A perilous test this, for nothing but goodness in a man will make him kind to strangers (cf. Matt. v. 43—46). Note. *Her very frankness is an appeal to his better nature* for a continuance of his succour and protection. So humble souls cast themselves always at the feet of Christ. They disguise nothing, they feel that they deserve nothing.

Notice that two things were in her favour, and would naturally tend to lead Boaz to listen to her appeal. (1) His own mother, Rahab, was once a stranger to Israel's hope. (2) The children of Israel had themselves been strangers, and were required to remember this (Deut. x. 19). Ruth, however, very properly looks upon her position as enhancing this kindness. *So with man's low estate* and the lovingkindness of God as displayed in the gift of Christ (Luke i. 48). Man's salvation must ever be a wonder to man, a source of never-ending gratitude and adoration. "*Why have I found grace in Thine eyes, that Thou shouldest take knowledge of me?*" the language of every regenerate heart (cf. Ezek. xvi.; John xv. 16).

LESSONS. (1) "He that exalteth himself shall be abased, but he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." Notice. That this was a presage of her better estate. Those which shall receive great blessings are ever thankful for little (*Bishop Hall*). (2) If poor souls be so thankful to us for a handful, or a sheaf, how should we be affected to our God, for whole fields-full, for full barns, full garners!

"He that has nature in him must be grateful;
'Tis the Creator's primary great law,
That links the chain of beings to each other,
Joining the greater to the lesser nature,
Tying the weak and strong, the poor and powerful." *Madan.*

"In her humility, Ruth, who had done so much for Naomi, and made so many sacrifices, expects no grace or help from others. Even the slight kindness of Boaz overwhelms her with gratitude. She flings herself at his feet, and pours out her thanks for the kindly notice he has taken of an alien and a stranger."—*Cox.*

"The Scripture often noteth this civil gesture and comely behaviour as worthy imitation. . . . What difference [is there] between this which is done to men and that which is done to God Almighty? Surely, in respect of the outward act, no difference is there at all, but of the mind, which doth conceive of God herein as God, and so this outward humiliation becometh divine adoration; and of man, but as man, worthy of reverence and honour for his place, his age, and gifts; and so the reverence and worship done him is only civil."—*Bernard.*

"Civil honour may and must be given to all in authority, according to the usual gestures of the country. Now such bowing was the custom of the Eastern people (Gen. xxxiii. 3). As for Mordecai's instance, it makes not against this, he being either immediately warranted by God, or else he refused to bow to Haman as being an Amalekite, betwixt which cursed brood and the Israelites the Lord commanded an eternal enmity."—*Fuller.*

"It is a beautiful thing to see persons in reduced circumstances really humbling themselves to their situation, and receiving kindness as it is intended. It is sad to witness the sullen contempt, the haughty dissatisfaction with which every benefit is received by such persons, when their hearts are not softened by grace. It is more blessed to give than to receive, and far, far easier to give in a right spirit than to receive aright. It is most difficult to find the correct medium between a proud rejection of needful relief and an indolent, self-indulgent dependence; between a haughty ingratitude of manner, if not of mind, and degrading sycophancy: but all things are possible to him that believeth; and he who has treasure and a name in heaven will know how to give to the things of earth their due value; and, governed by the will of God rather than by the ebullitions of pride and selfishness, will tread the narrow way."—*Macartney.*

"It may be clearly seen here, that only such as can exercise love understand how to receive it. No one is humbler than he who truly gives from love; of that Ruth is a proof; and for that reason humility never

shows itself more beautiful than when love receives. Ruth had made the greatest sacrifices, although no one had a right to expect them from her, and is withal so unassuming as not to look for anything from others. Most people in her place would have made the first favour shown them the occasion for saying, that in truth they were not at all used to such work. Their thanks would have been combined with complaints and accusing insinuations about the distress in which they found themselves, although they had exchanged the people and god of Moab for those of Israel. Ruth's love did not spring from selfishness, and hence did not give birth to any proud self-consciousness."—*Lange.*

"Oh, then, if Ruth interpreted it such a kindness that Boaz took notice of her, being a stranger, how great is the love of God to us, who loved us in Christ when we were 'strangers and aliens from the commonwealth of Israel.' As the never-failing foundation of the earth is firmly fastened, for ever fleeting, yet settled on no other substance than its own ballasted weight; so God's love was founded on neither cause nor condition in the creature, but issued only out of His own free favour. So that in this respect we may all say unto God what Ruth doth unto Boaz in the text, 'Why have we found favour in Thine eyes, that Thou shouldest take knowledge of us, seeing we are but strangers?'"—*Fuller.*

"Here shines forth her humility, modesty, and many other graces: she was, as Gualther saith of the Lady Jane Grey, 'Pietatis, prudentiæ, et modestiæ delicium.' Hence she found so much favour, for true goodness is very lovely, *οτττι χαλον φιλον εστι . . . .* 'Non sum dignus. Domine, quem diligas,' saith Augustine. Every saint may say with admiration, as he did in John xiv. 22, 'Lord, how is it that Thou hast manifested Thyself to us, and not to the world?'"—*Trapp.*

"Receiving, unless we keep a watch upon our hearts, tends to nurture the meaner and the baser self, the churl spirit within us, which is ever stretching out its greedy hand for gain; but giving belongs to that larger life, which was ours when man was made in the image of his God, 'for it is God that giveth liberally, and upbraideth not.'"—*B.*

VERSE 11

Theme.—THE SECOND GRACIOUS APPROVAL.

"Kindness in woman, not her beauteous looks,
Shall win my love."—*Shakespeare.*

"Think not the good,
The gentle deeds of mercy thou hast done,
Shall die forgotten all: the poor, the pris'ner,
The fatherless, the friendless, and the widow,
Who daily own the bounty of thine hand,
Shall cry to Heaven, and pull a blessing on thee."—*Rowe.*

And Boaz answered, It hath been fully showed me all that thou hast done . . . . and how thou hast left thy father and thy mother . . . . and art come, etc.

Never was there given to man such a manual for elegance and delicacy in his social relations as the Bible gives (*Tyng*). Many of the Old Testament saints models in this respect.

"He is gentle that doth gentle deeds."—*Chaucer.*

Boaz an instance of politeness growing out of real sympathy and benevolence. We have in his words condescension without haughtiness, commendation without assumption, familiarity without coarseness, delicacy without pretence. Note. (*a*) *Defect in manners is usually the defect of fine perceptions* (*Emerson*). (*b*) *Refinement of heart springs only from faith* (*Lange*). It is the natural outgrowth of a disposition permeated with the humility of the gospel of truth (*ibid.*).

Observe, **I. We can never live a truly noble life without its being known sooner or later.** Fame follows virtue as the shadow does the body (*Trapp*). Well-doing not only deserves praise, but brings favour. Beauty may be defaced, strength may decay, but virtue must always be lovely to those who themselves are virtuous. They seek it, appreciate it, love it wherever it is to be found. So Ruth, and even Orpah, with that which they saw in Naomi (i. 10), and now Boaz with that which he sees in Ruth.

"He whose mind
Is virtuous, is alone of noble kind;
Though poor in fortune, of celestial race."—*Dryden.*

Ruth's virtues shine conspicuous (*a*) in her good deeds to Naomi and the dead (see on i. ver. 8, 9, p. 39); (*b*) in that which she denied herself; (*c*) in her choice of Israel and Israel's God [i. 14—17, pp. 60—70].

Notice. (1) *She did no more than she apprehended to be her duty*—no more than satisfied her own conscience. Hence her surprise. "Why have I found grace?" (ver. 10.) So with the Psalmist. "What is man, that Thou art mindful of him?" etc. A common attribute of noble spirits displayed here. They do not see the dignity of the life they lead. It seems insignificant, even commonplace. What could be more insignificant than a gleaner's history? Still conscience reigns; there is loyalty to duty, to convictions, to God; and it is this that will elevate and ennoble the meanest life.

(2) *She thought herself unknown and perhaps neglected.* This gracious stranger appears to be perfectly familiar with her whole history. So our fidelity may be secret: He with whom we have to do brings our secret things to light. "There is nothing covered that shall not be revealed, nor hid that shall not be known"—a promise often and partially fulfilled in this world, certainly and completely in the next. *It hath been fully showed me.* Note. God's revealing a full one, when His purposes are ripe.

II. We can never do good to others without its bringing a due and appropriate reward. Naomi must have spoken and told all. How, indeed, could she keep silent? Note. *Virtue shall not want trumpeters* (*Bernard*). Even the very stones would have cried out, when Goodness incarnate stood among men, and the hour of His triumph had come (Luke xix. 40), rather than that He had been without the praise which was His due. A story like Ruth's sure to touch a cord of sympathy somewhere or other. Who can tell where or how? Note. *The ways in which reward is to come, mysterious, but certain—unexpected, but how often nearer than we could have imagined!* Ruth begins to reap now for all her past fidelity. Faithful in that which is least, she is to be rewarded with that which seemed to be much.

III. We can never really come to trust in God, and be disappointed either of recognition or recompence. This at the root of all else, the moral of the whole history. Ruth had honoured God, now she finds God begin to honour her. Little did she expect it! Had not, could not have had, the remotest idea of temporal reward. Naomi's words were too plain. [See on i. 11—13, pp. 46—48.]

So with all those in the position pathetically described by Mynster, the Danish bishop: "I know that I am among the *called*, and I muse night and day, in watching and praying, that I may be also among the *chosen*." So with Abraham leaving his fatherland, like Ruth, for God. So with Moses leaving the court of Pharaoh to be with God's people in affliction. So with the apostles, who became aliens for Christ's sake. So with true converts and proselytes in all ages; they come out, leaving all, not knowing whither they go.

Notice, then, as encouraging and always true of such. God gives to them (1) reception; (2) recognition; (3) recompence. (1) *He receives such;* not a single instance of one ever having been rejected. "Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out." Even sin cannot hinder, if we are persuaded; for it is said of Him to whom we come, "This man receiveth sinners." (2) *He recognizes such;* knows them as His own (John x. 3, 14), and causes them to be known as His. "His Church is to be as a city set upon a hill" (Matt. v. 14). His people are to be "as the stones of a crown, lifted up as an ensign" (Zech. ix. 16). Said that "by faith the elders *obtained a good report;*" and Paul, writing to the Thessalonians, says, "In every place your faith Godward *is spread abroad*" (1 Thess. i. 8). (3) *He recompenses such.* (See next outline.)

LESSONS.—(1) Well-doing provides favour to the poor, though strangers, at the hands of the virtuous (*Bernard*). (2) Let the rich in Christ learn where the first

claim upon their charity must always lie, viz., to the poor who are of the "household of faith." (3) Let the poor labour for grace and godliness (*Bernard*), that they may deserve help when they need it.

"Always say a kind word if you can, if only that it may come in, perhaps, with singular opportuneness, entering some mournful man's darkened room like a beautiful firefly, whose happy circumvolutions he cannot but watch, forgetting his many troubles."—*Helps.*

"Did it ever strike you that goodness is not merely a beautiful thing, but *the* beautiful thing,—by far the most beautiful thing in the whole world? So that nothing is to be compared for value with goodness; that riches, honour, power, pleasure, learning, the whole world and all in it, are not worth having in comparison with being good; and the utterly best thing for a man is to be good, even though he were never to be rewarded for it."—*Kingsley.*

"A beautiful form is better than a beautiful face; a beautiful behaviour is better than a beautiful form: it gives a higher pleasure than statues or pictures; it is the finest of the fine arts."—*Emerson.*

"As might have been expected, the generous heart of Boaz opens all the wider as he listens to her thanks, and learns how unassuming she is, how grateful even for the easy kindness he has shown her. He knows who she is and what she has done. And the piety as well as the generosity of the man comes out in his reply: 'You have left all,' he says, 'in your love for Naomi,—father, mother, and the land of your nativity. The Lord recompense you for this good deed,' etc., etc. Obviously, Boaz had the history of his great ancestor in his mind. Like Ruth, Abraham had left all, and gone out into a strange country. And to him God had said, 'I am thy great reward.' May the blessing of faithful Abraham come on faithful Ruth; this is the wish and prayer of Boaz. He speaks not as a Hebrew landowner to a Moabitish vagabond and beggar, but rather as a Hebrew judge and prophet,—as a prophet who knew that even the stranger who works righteousness and shows kindness is acceptable to God."—*Cox.*

"Nothing can be meaner than flattery addressed either to the rich or poor, but it may frequently be proper to praise those who deserve to be praised. Our Lord praises His disciples when He tells them that they were the men who had continued with Him in His temptations. Paul often commends the Christians to whom he wrote his epistles, although he never failed to remind them that they were indebted to the grace of God for all that was worthy of praise in their conduct or temper. Boaz commended Ruth, not to inspire her with vanity, but to animate her resolution, to comfort her dejected spirit, and to encourage her to use those freedoms which he wished her to use with himself and with other Israelites."—*Lawson.*

"Let this encourage men in their virtuous proceedings, knowing that their worthy deeds shall not be buried in obscurity, but shall find tongues in their lively colours to express them. Absalom, having no children, and desirous to perpetuate his name, erected 'a pillar in the king's dale,' and the same 'is called Absalom's pillar unto this day.' But the most compendious way for men to consecrate their memories to eternity is to erect a pillar of virtuous deeds, which shall ever remain, even when the most lasting monument in the world shall be consumed, as not able to satisfy the ravenous appetite of all-consuming time. And to put the worst, grant the envious men with a cloud of calumnies should eclipse the beams of virtuous memories from shining in the world, yet this may be their comfort, that God that 'sees in secret' will 'reward them openly.'"—*Fuller.*

"The merit which Boaz imputes to Ruth is of a twofold nature. Induced by affection, she has left the highest possessions of life. She was no orphan; she was not homeless; she had what she needed; but left all, and that for something unknown, the value of which she was not able to estimate. 'Thou camest,' he says, 'to a people which yesterday, and the day before yesterday (formerly), thou didst not know.' How? had she not known her family, Naomi, and her own husband, who were of Israel? But this family lived in Moab, where Israel's law was not in force. The national usages and institutions which had been impressed upon Israel by Israel's God she did not know; and notwithstanding this she had said, 'Thy people is my people, and thy God my God.'"—*Lange.*

"Many who are connected by affinity think that no more duties remain to be performed when the bond of connection is broken by the death of that husband or wife on whom the relation depended. Naomi and Ruth were of a different spirit. Naomi never could forget Ruth's kindness to her son. Ruth testified her regard to the memory of her deceased husband by her attentions to his mother. She not only did 'good and not evil' to her husband 'all the days of her life,' but she did all the good she could to him when he was dead, by performing those services to his mother which he would gladly have performed if he had been still alive. The apostle John testified his affection to his departed Lord by taking His mother to his own house and treating her as a mother. There are kindnesses due to the dead as well as to the living, and in these a generous spirit will be careful not to fail."—*Lawson.*

"Rouse to some work of high and holy love,
And thou an angel's happiness shalt know,—
Shalt bless the earth while in the world above;
The good begun by thee shall onward flow
In many a branching stream, and wider grow;
The seed that in these few and fleeting hours
Thy hands unsparing and unwearied sowed,
Shall deck thy grave with amaranthine flowers,
And yield thee fruits divine in heaven's immortal bowers." *Wilcox*

VERSE 12.

Theme.—The Recompence of Reward.

"The soul that works and lives throughout all time
Embrace you in the happy bonds of love."—*Goethe.*

"'Tis Thine alone to calm the pious breast
With silent confidence and holy rest;
From Thee, great God! we spring—to Thee we tend,
Path, Motive, Guide, Original, and End."—*Johnson.*

The Lord [Jehovah] *recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee.*

Naomi in her poverty had blessed Ruth (i. 8, 9), now Boaz takes up the same strain. Must be something good in those whom poor and rich alike join to praise. Note. (*a*) *The craving of the human heart for the approval of others not necessarily wrong in itself.* It is the undue craving, etc. Unexpected, unsought in the present instance, and therefore all the sweeter. When we have the prayers and good wishes of the righteous, heaven itself is touched; and when we win their approval and blessing, it is as though the benediction of God rested upon us (Ps. xxxvii. 22). Note. *There is a sense in which every believer may be a priest and prophet to those around him* [cf. on i. 8, 9, p. 39].

Remark, I. **On the Divine recompence as expected and looked for by the righteous.** "I know it shall be well with them that fear God;" the language of every truly believing heart. Much that seems against this; but faith looks through the darkness, and beyond the shadows; knows that there is a power that works for righteousness at the centre of all things, and that every deed of love is sure to meet with its due acknowledgment, and cannot pass unregarded of God (Matt. x. 41—43). Note. It is only our little side of the world which is in the shadow at night time, the whole universe else is filled with light.

Mark, (1) then, *That there is a recompence of reward* [Gen. xv. 1; Ps. xix. 11]. God is no respecter of persons. In every nation he that feareth Him and worketh righteousness is accepted (Acts x. 34, 35). Such have the promise of this life and of that which is to come. Note, *Our doings stand linked in Scripture with our reward.* Not that they earn the recompence, but that they regulate, they measure, they foreshadow that which is to be given as only God can give [Matt. vii. 2, xxv. 21, 23].

Mark, (2) *That the godly earnestly desire this recompence of reward.* (*a*) *For themselves.* They look forward, as the hireling, to the end of the day, when rest begins, and every man shall receive, etc. (Matt. xx. 1—16). Not that they look forward merely with the hireling's spirit. No! but reward means with them, life completed, holiness manifested, nearness to Christ. Therefore they have a desire, like Paul (Phil. i. 23; 2 Tim. vi. 8). (*b*) *For others,* as here. They see the righteous in times of trial and poverty, as Boaz saw Ruth. They feel how inadequate is any reward they themselves may bestow. And where they fall short, they turn to God: "The Lord recompense," etc. Note. *Boaz did something to bring about this recompence himself*—a hint to such as are lavish in good wishes, lax in corresponding deeds.

Remark, II. then, **On the Divine recompence as prayed for by the righteous.** (1) *These prayers for the recompence of reward may have a personal aspect,* as here. There are some deeds that men can repay; others God Himself only can recompense. Ruth's heroism and self-denial, a type of that which is sustained "as seeing things that are invisible;" which looks for a reward not manifested as yet. Note. (*a*) *Boaz prays for God's recompence, not man's;* a full reward, abundant as His love; so that she shall miss nothing, but recover all (*Lange*). But mark, he prays for this only in the measure of her worth and her work. His prayer has respect to what he has seen and heard, even while he is calling upon the Unseen

for a blessing beyond the power of man to bestow—a characteristic of all true prayer. There is nothing wild, nothing random, nothing extravagant, in the good wishes and supplications of the righteous. But again note, (*b*) that *God's reward is always a full reward.* Oh! the sure and bountiful payments of the Almighty! Whoever came under His wing in vain? Whoever lost by trusting Him? Whoever forsook the Moab of this world for the true Israel, and did not at last rejoice in the change? (*Bishop Hall.*)

(2) *These prayers for the recompence of reward may have a wider aspect.* There is a mysterious connection between prayer and Christ's own recompence upon earth. He is to see of the travail of His soul, but this only as the Church waits upon God in prayer. For this He will be enquired of by the house of Israel (Ezek. xxxvi. 37). The righteous prosper as prayer prevails, the kingdom of heaven spreads as men have power with God. Hence the Church is always to be a praying Church; and when her arms are weary, as with Moses (Exod. xvii. 11, 12), the enemy prevails, and the Divine recompence lingers. Wrong, confusion, evil, seem to have the best of it. It is an age in which the spirits of the martyred ones are represented as crying out, "How long, O Lord?" (Rev. vi. 16.)

Remark, **III. On the Divine recompence as certain to the righteous.** Dionysius is said to have promised a great reward to some musicians who played before him. When they came for it, he told them it was theirs already. They possessed it, in their very hope and expectations of it. A truth taught in this, but not the whole truth. Righteousness is good in and for itself, and brings its present reward in the glorious hope it inspires. But this is not all. God does not disappoint His children. There is something more awaiting us, something hereafter.

Notice then that God's reward comes (1) *Sometimes in temporel gifts and blessings, as here; always in the approval of conscience.* The Mosaic economy recognized both these, but laid a stress upon the former; while the Christian dispensation makes the spiritual, the inner reward, the great thing. (2) *Sometimes in the recognition and approval of good men, as here; always in the recognition and approval of God.* A craving for the former becomes Pharisaism; and therefore the latter is rather to be the distinguishing sign of Christian discipleship [cf. Matt. vi. 1—6, 16—18]. (3) *Sometimes in the spiritual growth and changes which accompany right doing, as here; always in the after reward of eternity.* No doubt that right actions draw us nearer to God, bring peace and quietness of heart now, incline us to become recipients of His mercy, who alone can save. Every deed of righteousness is an acknowledgment of the law which He would bind upon men, and so is a turning to Him and His; not unreward here, not unreward in itself, but to be more fully recompensed hereafter. Note. (*a*) *The workman is not fully paid until his work is done* (Matt. xx. 8); and (*b*) *That all earthly rewards are partial and unsatisfactory* (Luke xiv. 14). It is heaven that is to compensate for the inequalities in the Divine recompence here. As the end approaches, the reward will become more and more apparent (Ps. xxxvii. 4—6, 22—37).

"We find in the Scriptures three sorts of blessings among men. The first is the blessing of a simple wish, which is the most common. Men, naturally limited and feeble, have scarcely anything to bestow but good wishes; they can hardly give anything but their promises, of which, for the most part, they are not very sparing. Their blessings in this particular consist of prayers, which they mutually offer, that the Almighty will deign to preserve—to fill with grace, with joy, and happiness—the persons whom they bless. . . . The second kind are paternal blessings, which include, besides the wish, an act of approbation and authority. Fathers, then, represent in some sense the Deity. Thus almost all the blessings of the patriarchs were prophetical, because in effect the Spirit of God inspired them. . . . The third kind are blessings of command, which are given with authority, by a power received from God to bless in His name and in His stead. Thus Moses blessed the people in the character of their leader and mediator. Melchizedec, both a king and a priest, blessed Abraham, and in his person all the patriarchs. Jesus Christ, the King of peace and righteousness, blessed His apostles, and in their persons the whole Church."—*Superville.*

"The kindness I show thee is little in com-

parison of thy desert; God alone can give thee a *full reward* for thy kindness to thy husband and mother-in-law, and He will do it because thou art come to trust under His wing."—*A. Clarke.*

"Boaz does not discourse as one would speak to a Moabitish beggar. Having heard who she is, he looks upon her with eyes full of joy over her pious actions. He speaks to her as a priest and prophet. And since he spake from the enthusiasm of piety, and she was deserving, his words found fulfilment. She received a reward that was not only full, but which completed and wholly filled her; all of which is implied in the [Heb.] words." —*Lange.*

"When we begin to feel ourselves lag in Christianity, let us spur on our affections with the meditation of that 'full reward' which we shall in due time receive; with our Saviour, let us 'look to the joys which are set before us;' and with Moses, let us have 'an eye to the recompence of reward;' yet so that, though we look at this reward, yet also we must look through it and beyond it. This meditation of the reward is a good place for our souls to bait at, but a bad place for our souls to lodge in. We must mount our minds higher—namely, to aim at the glory of God, at which all our actions must be directed, though there were no reward propounded unto them."—*Fuller.*

"Plutarch tells of a complaint which came from the Islands of the Blessed because improper persons were sent there by the judges in the earthly courts. It was found that titled and noble persons went before the judges with their friends, who solemnly swore that they deserved to be sent to the Islands of the Blessed when they deserved the contrary. It was then decreed by eternal doom that no judgment should be passed till after death, and then only by spirits who could discern the qualities of those whom they judged."—*Dictionary of Illustrations.*

"There are great rewards like jewelled crowns; there are little rewards like diamond dust; the great deed of love shall receive its great reward, and the little deed shall receive its measure too; and so it shall be found hereafter that nothing was forgotten."—*Power.*

"Reward and recompence unto our good works are not due unto us for any worth of our own, but merely from God's free favour and gracious promise. For to make a thing truly meritorious of a reward, it is required, first, that the thing meriting be our own, and not another's. Now our best works are none of ours, but God's Spirit in us. Secondly, it is requisite that we be not bound of duty to do it. Now we are bound to do all the good deeds which we do, and still remain but 'unprofitable servants.' Thirdly, there must be a proportion between the thing meriting and the reward merited. Now there is no proportion between our stained and imperfect works (for such are our best), and that infinite weight of glory wherewith God will reward us. It remains, therefore, that no reward is given us for own inherent worth, but merely for God's free favour, who crowns His own works in us."—*Fuller.*

"Longing for heaven, if there be no yearning and endeavour for present pureness of life and inward peace, . . . can be but an eager, sanguine lust—never a solemn, inspiring hope."—*Lynch.*

"He who sacrifices a whole offering shall be rewarded for a whole offering; he who offers a burnt-offering shall have the reward of a burnt-offering; but he who offers humility to God and man shall receive as great a reward as though he had offered all the sacrifices in the world."—*Talmud.*

"There is an invariable connection between the outpouring of spiritual influence and the ascent of prayer, and the latter is the antecedent of the former; and we believe, verily, that there never was an instance yet, in the history of the Christian Church, signalized by the revival and extension of true religion, which was not preceded by another period of humiliation and anxious and agonizing prayer. . . . At the sixty-second chapter of the prophecies of Isaiah, you read, 'For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace'—*that is, in prayer*—'until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth; and the Gentiles shall see Thy righteousness, and all kings Thy glory.' Then God speaks in the sixth verse: 'I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night'—*that is, in prayer.* 'Ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence' —*that is, in prayer;* 'and give Him no rest till He establish and make Jerusalem a praise in the earth.' 'Give Him no rest'—*that is, in prayer.* Shake off the lethargy which has oppressed you, enter into the holiest of all, bring before it the blood of propitiation, and stand before the Shekinah with unwearied and importunate *prayer.*"—*Parsons.*

VERSE 12.

Theme.—THE WINGS OF THE ALMIGHTY.

"The while He sits whose name is Love,
And waits, as Noah did the dove,
To see if she would fly to him.

"He waits for us, while, houseless things,
We beat about with bruisèd wings

On the dark floods and water-springs,
The ruin'd world, the desolated sea;
With open windows from the prime,
All night, all day, He waits sublime,
Until the fulness of the time
Decreed from His eternity."—*Jean Ingelow.*

Under whose wings thou art come to trust.

In all ages and nations conversion is essentially the same; irreligion or false religion is exchanged for the spiritual worship of the true God (*Scott*). The alien in birth, or in heart and life, comes to take shelter under the wings of the Almighty. The hour of repentance and conversion is the hour of this turning and taking shelter, whenever and wherever it may be. Note. *We are all aliens by birth.* Humanity left the Ark of shelter ages ago, and has been wandering about like the poor fluttering dove (Gen. viii. 9) ever since.

You will notice—

I. That the Divine willingness to receive men is assumed here. And this, although they are aliens to the commonwealth of Israel, and children of the sinful race of Moab. So with ourselves. There are times when we must have help or perish; there are dangers from which none but God can save us. Note. *We seek wisely only when we seek Godward, as here.* The wings under which Ruth had come to trust, (1) *swift*, (2) *broad*, (3) *strong*, (4) *gentle* (*Talmage*). She had come to that One who had revealed Himself to Israel, as a personal God, tender, sympathetic, mighty to save. It is so with all true proselytes. They come not merely to Israel, but to Israel's God; not merely to the Church, but to Him who is Head of the Church. Note. *The two aspects of the Divine character brought together here.* God the Refuge is also God the Rewarder. So Christ (Heb. xii. 2) is the author and finisher of faith, One strengthening and supporting, and yet "holding forth the crown of life."

Observe, then, that when the sinner seeks pardon, or the soul seeks help, (1) *It is here*, in God. He has undertaken to protect, to save such [cf. Isa. xliii. 25, lv. 6, 7; John iii. 16, 17]. (2) *It is ready and waiting.* The wings outspread from the foundations of the earth. Outside is danger, inside is protection; outside is wandering, inside is rest; outside is destruction, inside is salvation. Note. *The grace that comes too late is no grace at all.* What you and I want is a God now (*Talmage*).

II. That the human readiness to seek God is looked upon as necessary. Ruth had *come*, etc. Blessed truth! for that opened the way to all the rest of her history. Man's great sin always is that *he will not come.* More, Boaz takes it for granted that she had faith; for he that cometh to God must believe, etc. (*Bernard*).

Men come to God (1) *To trust.* Where else can man find a fitting sphere for faith but Godward? (2) To find shelter (Ps. xci.). (3) To find deliverance. (4) To find rest and reward.

R. Macbeth on this :—

Theme.—THE SHELTERING WING.

We have here one of those grand and suggestive *figures of speech* with which the Old Testament Scriptures abound, and by which those Scriptures become, to the "scribe well instructed," an inexhaustible mine of "things new and old," "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness."

The figure—suggested perhaps in the first instance by the divinely prescribed symbolism of the cherubim overshadowing with their wings the mercy-seat—is of frequent occurrence, with richly beautiful variations of aspect, especially in the earlier books of Scripture and in the Psalms [cf. Exod. xix. 4; Deut. xxxii. 11, 12; Ps. xvii. 8, xxxvi. 7, lvii. 1, lxi. 4, lxiii. 7, xci. 4]. By this image we are taught to think of God—

I. As a beneficent sheltering power, to whom the spirit of man, wounded, wearied, baffled by the ills of life, turns and flees for refuge and rest (Ps. xlvi. 1). But this primary conception by no means exhausts the significance of the figure. It suggests—

II. The paternal relationship of God to His people, and the benign constancy and carefulness with which He fulfils the obligations of that relationship. "As an eagle stirreth up her nest," etc. (Deut. xxxii. 11, 12). This implies (1) Nurture, (2) culture, (3) development, (4) guidance.

It suggests further—

III. The beauty, grace, and tenderness of the Divine action towards man. We naturally ascribe these qualities in a special degree to the feathered tribes. And the inspired writer takes this natural conception of ours, and fills it with an inspired thought of God. Just as elsewhere it is said, "He that formed the eye, shall He not see?" etc.; so here we would say, He that taught the dove to soften the nest for her young with the feathers from her own breast, shall He not deal tenderly, graciously, even to self-sacrificing acts of love, with those whom He regards as His own offspring? (1) He covers them with His feathers (Ps. xci. 4); (2) He keeps them as the apple of His eye (Ps. xvii. 8), etc. We have here, not the mere negations of the agnostic, but the God of Israel revealing Himself to the hearts of men; not the vague sentiment of the Pantheist, but the living, personal God, entering into human relationships with human spirits; "Immanuel, God with us." Not the mere "fate," or "law" of either ancient or modern paganism, but the loving Friend who knows His friends, and is known of them (Prov. xviii. 24). In short, we have here a foreshadowing, "as men were able to bear it," of the final manifestation of the fulness of the Godhead in Him who said, "How often would I have gathered you," etc.

E. Price on this:—

Theme.—THE HABIT OF HOLY COMMUNION.

In this benediction we see—

I. A clear definition of the happiness the soul desires.
- *It* would feel it is under Jehovah's protection, like a bird under the wing of its mother.
- *It* would find repose in communion with Him, confiding unsuspectingly in His favour.

II. The act of the soul itself that would enjoy the blessing.
- It must put itself under the Divine protection.
- God always works through our willinghood.

III. The law illustrated by the facts under consideration.
- The holier the life, the deeper is to be the enjoyments of the soul.
- In this sense, the fellowship a *Ruth* has with her God is the reward of grace.

"The living God was exhibited to the faith of His ancient people, as the God who dwelt between the cherubims that spread their wings over the mercy-seat, the throne of His grace. It was perhaps in allusion to this symbol of God's residence amongst His people, that those who sought protection from Him were said to trust under the shadow of His wings. 'He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. His feathers shall cover thee; under His wings shalt thou trust; His faithfulness shall be thy shield and buckler.'"—*Lawson.*

"This life is but a sort of outward stage, on which we act for a time, and which is only sufficient and only intended to answer the purpose of trying whether we will serve God or no."—*Dr. Newman.*

"How inexcusable are we, if we do not make the Lord our refuge, when we were born in a land blessed with the knowledge of Him, baptized in His name, and trained up to know and serve Him! If a Moabitess came to trust under the wings of the Lord God of Israel, how shameful was it in Israelites not to know and trust the God by whose name they were called!"—*Lawson.*

"Truly this poor stranger is like some poor, helpless, fluttering bird exposed to wild storms and unfriendly influences; she needs shelter and fostering, and God will cover and nurture

her beneath His protecting wing—wing that ensures perfect safety, but brings no darkness. Ah! it is a grand belief this man has in the 'God of Israel.' It is no cold speculation about a distant incomprehensible Deity, a Being of icy mountainous magnificence, a Being who is but a combination of mysterious forces and laws; but a firm faith in One who is a very Father, tenderly cherishing the weak, caring for every child's life, comforting in sorrow, sheltering in danger, abundantly rewarding every good word and work. Would that the strong confidence of this man were ours!"—*Braden.*

"There is nothing softer than a feather. You have noticed, when a bird returns from flight, how gently it stoops over the nest. The young birds are not afraid of having their lives trampled out by the mother-bird. The old whip-poor-will drops into its nest of leaves, the oriole into its casket of bark, the humming-bird into its hammock of moss, gentle as the light. And so, says the Psalmist, He shall cover thee with His wing. Oh, the gentleness of God!"—*Talmage.*

"In summer the hen's wings are a canopy to keep her chickens from the heat of the scorching sun: and in winter they are a mantle to defend them from the injury of the piercing cold. So God's providence and protection makes His children to sprout, thrive, and prosper under it. In prosperity, God's providence keepeth them from the heat of pride; in adversity, it preserveth them from being benumbed with frozen despair."

"Let not us trust to the broken wall of our own strength, or think to lurk under the tottering hedge of our own wealth, or wind—shaken reeds of our unconstant friends; but fly to God, that He may stretch His wings over us, as the cherubim did over the mercy-seat."—*Fuller.*

"Thou, O God, hast created us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless until they find rest in Thee. . . . I have heard all that philosophers can say, but none of them ever said what Jesus of Nazareth has said, 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.'"—*Augustine.*

"What cares the child when the mother rocks it, though all storms beat without? So we, if God doth shield and tend us, shall be heedless of the tempests and blasts of life, blow they never so rudely."—*Beecher.*

VERSES 13, 14.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.—**Let me find favour.** I find favour (*Le Clerc, Bertheau*). This trans. not in accordance with the modesty of humility which Ruth manifests in the following words (*Keil*). Lange and Keil take it as optative, and translate, "May I find favour." The sense rather is as in Psalm xli. 11. (By this I know that) *I am finding favour*, because Thou comfortest me, etc. (*Speaker's Com.*). She had found favour in his sight already. The words are to be translated as expressing this, and not a further desire. So Gill and others. **Spoken friendly.** Lit. to the heart. Trans. kindly (Gen. xxiv. 3, l. 21); comfortably, (2 Sam. xix. 7), etc. (*Speaker's Com.*). **Be not like unto.** Lit. be not as—that is, not on a par with them (*Wordsworth*). But what am I saying when I call myself thy maiden? I am not worthy to be compared to the least of thy maidens (*Carpzov*). The LXX. leaves out the negative particle, and trans., "I shall be as one of thy handmaidens." So the Syriac, which reads, "And she said to him, Because I have found mercy in thine eyes, my lord, and thou hast consoled me and comforted me, I will be as one of thine handmaids." So the Arabic, with some variations. Boaz had placed her among his handmaids (ver. 9), and goes on to treat her as such (ver. 14). Nothing could be more delicate or appropriate than the language of the Syr. trans., or more in accordance with Eastern ways of speech.

Ver. 14. **At mealtime.** Lit. at the time of food (*Wright*). The time of the noontide lunch. The principal meal was taken after the labours of the day were over (*Steele and Terry*). **Bread,** provisions generally. **Vinegar,** Heb. *chomets*, a cooling and refreshing drink made of sour wine mingled with oil; still used in the East (*Keil, Wordsworth, Rosen., etc.*). A kind of acid sauce (*A. Clarke*). Used because of the heat of the season (*Jarci, Aben Ezra*). The Midrash gives an allegorical sense to this, as meaning the chastisement and affliction of the Messiah. **Dip thy morsel in the vinegar.** Cf. Christ's words when He gave the sop to Judas (John xiii. 26). The Arabs to this day dip the bread and hand together (*Dr. Shaw*). It is truly incredible how the biscuit, eaten with vinegar and oil, strengthens the weary and exhausted system, and restores its powers (*Heberer*). The drink of the Roman soldiers, called *posca*, consisted of water and vinegar (*Lange*). **Sat beside the reapers.** From this *we may not infer* the two sexes ordinarily took their meals together (*Steele and Terry*). **Parched corn.** Made of the best ears, when they are not too ripe. Roasted in a pan or on an iron plate (*Robinson*). The green ears become half charred by the roasting, and there was a pleasant mingling of milky wheat and a fresh crust flavour as we chewed the parched corn (*Tristram*). **And was sufficed** [satisfied] **and left** [over]. Was obliged to leave some, which it seems (ver. 18) she carried home to her mother-in-law (*Gill*).

VERSE 13.

Theme.—THE HEART REALIZING A MINISTRY OF LOVE.

"Virtue is bold, and goodness never fearful."—*Shakespeare.*

"Low at Thy feet I lie, my Saviour and my God,
Low at Thy feet I lie, nor feel the chastening rod;
Who lose their all to find the Spirit here,
Have found this freedom from all further fear,
Safe at Thy feet."—*B.*

Let me find favour in thy sight, my lord: for that [or, I am finding, etc., because *thou hast comforted, etc.*

A thankful heart will seek the continuance even of undeserved favours. Ruth did not wonder more at the kindness of Boaz (ver. 10), than show herself ready to respond to it. The text is not so much a request as an acknowledgment;—she had found favour in his sight already [see Crit. and Exeg. Notes],—and should be so translated.

See here, **I. The secret of all true and effective ministries.** (1) *He had "spoken to the heart"* [so the Heb., LXX.]. The hidden springs of sensibility had been opened, and here is the response. So when the Jews comforted Mary and Martha (John xi. 19), the Syriac translates, "they spake with their heart." All other speech ineffective in comparison with this, especially so when speaking on such tender and momentous subjects as the soul's refuge, "the wings of the Almighty." (2) *He had spoken kindly in praising her virtues and in praying for her.* Kind words generally, if not always, unlock the human heart. (3) *He had comforted her in deed as well as in speech.* What wonder that she says, or seems to say, "I know by this that I am finding favour in thy sight"!

See here, **II. A beautiful instance of the heart becoming conscious of this ministry of love.** The meaning of his kindness dawns upon her, and is dawning, as she recounts the manner of its manifestation. [Trans. (I see that) I am finding favour in thy sight, because thou comfortest me (*Speaker's Com.*)]. So there is a special moment in the history of every Christian, when the heart begins to realize the Divine love. His comforts and His tenderness to us are seen, and shine out the more conspicuously as tokens of His regard.

Note. *She was not one of his handmaids, and yet she realizes that he is treating her as such.* Gives her a position among them, etc. So the Apostle sees himself as one born out of due season, not meet to be called an apostle, and yet raised to these privileges, etc. (1 Cor. xv. 8—10). So the prodigal finds himself placed among the children, and possessing a goodly heritage [comp. Jer. iii. 19 with Luke xv. 21—23]. So with all who are truly called and chosen of God. They see themselves the recipients of mercies and comforts, as unexpected as they are gracious; and exalted to a position and privileges not only dignified, but prophetic of still greater favours yet to come. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God," etc.

See here, **III. An instance of the heart responding to these tokens of good-will.** Ruth evidently felt that this was her one opportunity, and acts as though she felt it. Had not been forward in making known her claims, but, on the other hand, is not backward in responding to his kindness. (1) *She exalts her benefactor.* She calls him "my lord," and so magnifies his mercy. (2) *She is not unduly exalted herself.* Rather she feels her own humble position the more, and deprecates her own unworthiness: "I am not like unto one of thine handmaidens." So the centurion did not think himself worthy that Christ should come under his roof. To the humble, every mercy comes as the voice of undeserved kindness, which encourages without puffing up (*Macartney*).

So in spiritual things. The soul's response to "Seek ye my face" is, "Thy face, Lord, will I seek." While it magnifies the Divine mercy, and enlarges upon

the tokens of the Divine love, it is ready like Ruth to humble itself in the dust at the Master's feet.

LESSONS.—(1) It is lawful to give honourable titles to men, such as befit their place [cf. Gen. xxiii. 6; Num. xii. 11; 1 Sam. i. 15; 1 Kings xviii. 7; 2 Kings viii. 12]. (2) The more humble men of wealth show themselves, the more honour they get (*Bernard*). Those stars seem to us the greatest, and shine the brightest, which are set the lowest (*Fuller*). (3) Comfortable words do good like a medicine (*Trapp*). They do more, they bring out that which is good in the recipient. So here, the more generously Ruth is dealt with, the more unassuming does she become. So with the saints at last (Matt. xxv.): "Lord, when saw we Thee an hungred?" etc.

E. Price on this :—

Theme.—THE OUTWARD PROOF OF THE DIVINE REGARD.

He predisposes influential men to give us their affection.

Note the steps of the process :—

1. *We* are rendered acceptable to them, finding "favour" with them.

2. *We* are solaced amidst the providential movements around us. They comfort the heart.

3. *We* are addressed by the assuring words of sympathy.

They express the affection borne to us, and hence (4) we are astonished at the Lord's wonderful condescension to our unworthiness.

Infer. Humility bears direct proportion to our sense of the Divine favour.

Whenever a *Ruth* trusts in God, a *Boaz* is sure to appear.

"To the humble mind of Ruth the words of Boaz were the first sunbeam that broke through the grief and tears of many weeks. Hitherto she had tasted only parting sorrow. Now, for the first time, she is addressed about the God of Israel and His grace. The full import of his words her humble heart does not presume to appropriate. But the kindness of the speaker's voice is for her like the sound of a bubbling spring in the desert to the thirsty. A word of love comes on a loving heart like hers, long afflicted by sorrow, like morning dews on a thirsty field."—*Cassel (in Lange)*.

"Oh that ministers had this faculty of speech! not to tickle the ears, teach the heads, or please the brains of the people, but that their sermons might soak and sink to the root of their hearts. But though this may be endeavoured by them, it cannot be performed of them without God's special assistance. We may leave our words at the outward porch of men's ears; but His Spirit must conduct and lodge them in the closet of their hearts."—*Fuller*.

"Pleasant words are like an honeycomb, sweet to the soul. Those words which at once indicate friendship and nourish piety are doubly pleasant. Boaz had not only expressed his affection and esteem to Ruth, but raised her views to the Lord God of Israel, from whom he encouraged her to expect her reward. His words were no less valued by her than his gifts. Words are cheap to ourselves, and they may be very precious to those to whom they are addressed, especially to those who need our sympathy."—*Lawson*.

"A little word in kindness spoken,
A motion, or a tear,
Has often healed the heart that's broken,
And made a friend sincere."
Whittier.

"There are occasions when speech is golden rather than silence, and when an encouraging word would be of more real value than the richest material gift. . . . Some persons are far too much afraid of the effect of a little generous and well-timed praise. They would keep all their flowers in an ice house. Letting in a little sunshine upon them at times would not be amiss. How lavish was the wise and large-hearted Paul with his words of commendation, whenever they could be honestly spoken or written!"—*Dr. A. Thomson*.

"Opportunity is the flower of time, and as the stalk may remain when the flower is cut off, so time may remain with us when opportunity is gone."—*Bond*.

"Augustine being asked what was the first article in the Christian religion, replied, 'Humility;' and what the second, 'Humility;' and what the third, 'Humility.'"—*Dic. of Illustrations*.

"'Lord, when did we do all this?' So completely is their mind and memory filled with His goodness, that there is no standing-place there for any recollection of their own acts of love to Him. So abounding and immeasurable appears His love to them, that less than nothing, in the comparison, seems every act of theirs for Him in return. Like Ruth, they can praise Him for the comfort He has bestowed upon them, for the gracious and friendly way in which He has spoken to

them ; but all this only increases their sense of their own unworthiness of such mercy."—*Tyng.*

"The train of our adorable Immanuel is so august, so glorious by His communicated grace, that the poor believer cannot easily be brought to consider himself amongst the happy number. All the holy angels, all the glorified saints, day and night attend upon His pleasure ; ten thousand times ten thousand stand before Him, and thousands of thousands fly at His command. The patriarchs and prophets, the apostles and evangelists, the noble army of martyrs, and all the spirits of just men made perfect, swell His brilliant train ; and how can I, who am so black and swarthy, so wretched and sinful, be numbered amongst company so honourable? Whence is it to me that my Lord should regard me with favour, and permit me to approach Thy sacred presence, and encourage me to feed on the bounties of Thy grace?"—*Macgowan.*

VERSE 14.

Theme.—PROVISION FOR THE STRANGER AT THE GATE.

"That best portion of a good man's life:
His little, nameless, unremembered acts
Of kindness and of love."—*Wordsworth.*

"A poor man, served by thee, shall make thee rich ;
A sick man, helped by thee, shall make thee strong ;
Thou shalt be served thyself by every sense
Of service which thou renderest."—*Mrs. E. B. Browning.*

God has from the beginning made the cause of the poor man His own (*Baldwin Brown*). Rich men, if good men, are to be His almoners. To such Christ says, "The poor ye have always with you." See how natural kindness is to such! one deed of love leading to another and a better almost unconsciously. That of Boaz like an open fountain when it has once begun to flow (*Dr. Thomson*). From kind actions he goes on to comforting words, and from comforting words to kind actions once again. Wonderful how Providence does open the heart to strangers! Joseph was so affected by the treatment he received as such in Egypt, that he called one of his sons by a name expressive of what he felt (*Toller*). Boaz, in his treatment of Ruth, a beautiful illustration of the way Christ receives such.

I. He invites her to come and partake of the meal provided for his servants. Not meet to give the children's bread unto dogs (Matt. vii. 6 ; Mark vii. 27) ; and yet, from the voice calling Adam in the garden, to the Spirit and the bride saying "Come," in the Apocalypse, the Word of God is full of invitations to wandering, weary men. [Cf. also Luke xiv. 21—23.]

II. He seats her in honour among his reapers. So the Saviour calls the Gentiles to be co-heirs with His own people ; puts the alien among His children ; exalts Saul the persecutor to be the chiefest among the apostles ; gives His saints at last an inheritance among the angels of God.

III. He reaches forth his own hand to provide for her wants. So the Saviour sent not a servant, but came Himself, to provide for man's need. "He saw there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor" (Isa. lix. 16) "Therefore," He says, "mine own arm brought salvation" (Isa. lxiii. 5).

IV. He satisfies these wants completely. There was plain fare, but it was sufficient. Nature is content with a little, and hunger hunteth not after delicacies (*Trapp*). So in the spiritual realm, every real want of man is provided for by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Spurgeon on this (condensed) :—

Theme.—MEALTIME IN THE CORNFIELD: A HARVEST SERMON

I. God's reapers have their mealtimes. A good master will not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. Christ's reapers not only have a blessed reward at last ; they have also plenteous comforts by the way. *They have* (1) *mealtimes,*

when they come together to listen to the word preached. Where the doctrines of grace are plainly and boldly delivered in connection with the other truths of revelation; where the cross is lifted up, where the work of the Spirit is not forgotten, there is sure to be food for the children of God. Our hearers must have their portion of meat in due season. There must be something for all—milk for babes, etc.

(2) *Mealtimes in our private readings and meditations.* Meditation is digestion, and the finest wheat is to be found in secret prayer. The shepherd of Salisbury Plain said, when his wallet was empty, his Bible was meat to him. (3) *One mealtime that is specially ordained*—in the supper of our Lord. In keeping the Master's command there is great reward. Like poor Mephibosheth, we are made to sit at David's table. The prodigal eats the meat of children.

(4) *Mealtimes which God gives us at seasons when perhaps we little expect them.* In the street, in the middle of business; when dull and earth-bound; suddenly. In the morning, as if the dew was visiting the flowers; in the evening, etc. (5) *Mealtimes at certain seasons when we may expect them.* The Eastern reaper has a set time. So *in affliction* we may expect them; *after toil* we may look for them; and again, *before a trial.* Elijah must be entertained beneath a juniper tree, for he is to go forty days in the strength of that meat. *After* trouble or arduous service.

II. To these meals the gleaner is affectionately invited. The poor trembling stranger, who has no right to be in the field, except the right of charity, is called to the meals of the strong-handed, full-assured reaper.

(1) The gleaner is invited *to come.* "At mealtimes *come thou hither.*" None should be kept away from the place of feasting, the house of God, by personal character, or poverty, or physical infirmities. A poor deaf woman, asked why she was always there, replied, "that God was pleased to give her many a sweet thought upon the text while she sat in His house." (2) Again, *not only to come, but to eat.* Whatever the sweet and comfortable word, the broken and the contrite spirit is invited to partake of it. You are saying, "I have no right;" but He gives you the invitation. "You are unworthy;" but He bids you come. Further, Ruth was not only invited to eat the bread, but *to dip her morsel in the vinegar*—a sauce which the Orientals used with their bread. So the Lord's reapers have not merely doctrines, but the holy unction which is the essence of doctrines—not merely truths, but the hallowing and ravishing delight which accompanies the truths.

III. Boaz reached her the parched corn. Christ does this to believers (1) when He inspires their faith; (2) when He sheds abroad the love of God in their hearts; (3) when He gives us close communion with Himself; (4) when He gives us the infallible witness that we are born of God. Philip de Morny was wont to say that the Holy Spirit had made his salvation as clear to him as ever a problem proved to a demonstration in Euclid could be.

IV. She did eat, and was sufficed, and left. Sooner or later every penitent shall become a satisfied believer—head, heart, hope, desire, conscience, judgment, memory, imagination, all filled.

E. Price on this:—

Theme.—THE COMMON MEAL.

It should be characterized by the following particulars:—

It should indicate the Divine hand in providing it.

It should minister to the calm contentment of our hearts.

It should indicate a self-respect before men.

It should prepare for the next duties in life.

Hence conclude—

If God provide for a *Ruth*, the daily bread will not only come to the hand, but satisfy all the longings of the heart.

"One fact I think I have everywhere observed: the farther one moves from the high road and the busy marts of men, the more people are shut in by the mountains, isolated and confined to the simplest wants of life, the more they draw their maintenance from simple, humble, and unchangeable pursuits; so much the better, the more obliging, the more friendly, unselfish, and hospitable are they."—*Goethe.*

"You have seen the stagnant pool, overgrown with weeds, into which the rain falls and the showers descend, but which gives out no fertilizing stream to water the barren earth around. There is the image of an avaricious and selfish life—a life stagnant and noxious in the sight of God and man. And you have seen the mountain lake, clear as crystal, into which the brooks run and the streamlets flow, but which sends them forth again a broad river to refresh and make glad the earth. There is the image of a life responding to the law of Christian usefulness, counting itself as steward only for a while, and not as owner of all that it possesses."—*B.*

"Wherefore doth the Lord make your cup run over, but that other men's lips might taste the liquor? The showers that fall upon the highest mountains should glide into the lowest valleys."—*Secker.*

"The precept of love was given also in the moral law. That law contains ten commandments, but they may all be reduced to this, 'Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbour as thyself.' . . . If we go farther back still, we shall find the ancient commandment in existence; for the law of love is as old as human nature itself. 'God created man in His own image'—gave him a spiritual nature, possessed of the powers of thought, will, conscience, imagination, and the faculty of goodness or love. Two things should be noticed with regard to the last of these. First, the faculty of love belongs to him as man—is part of his nature. Treat the flower rightly, plant it where the sun-rays play, and it will grow and become beautiful, and will fill the surrounding atmosphere with its fragrance, for it is made to give itself away; and if man had been true to himself, if he had avoided sin, and lived in all his faculties, his good-will and love would have gone forth to his fellows as naturally as perfume from the flower. Second, the sense or feeling that love is right, that it is a duty; and that to hate others, or even to be indifferent to them, is wrong. This is the Divine testimony in man's conscience, the 'old commandment' of the gospel and of the law in another form—a silent commandment which makes itself heard and felt without the use of words."—*Thomas Jones.*

"The very essence of charity is disinterested goodness; and although we may like it the better for its returns of benefit, we must obey its impulses from delight itself. Where we fail in this, our charity fails, although our deeds of beneficence still be abounding."—*Anon.*

"The rich man's superfluity was ordained to relieve the poor man's necessity. A lady, on giving sixpence to a beggar, accosted him thus: 'I have now given you more than God ever gave me.' To whom he replied, 'No, madam; God hath given you all your abundance.' 'That is your mistake,' said she, 'for He hath but lent it me that I might bestow it on such as you.'"—*Secker.*

"Men resemble the gods in nothing so much as in doing good to their fellow-creatures."—*Cicero.*

"Seneca the heathen inculcates a principle worthy the credence of every Christian: 'I believe I truly enjoy no more of the world's affluence than what I willingly distribute to the necessitous.' Without your mercy the poor cannot live on earth, and without God's mercy you shall not live in heaven."—*Secker.*

"This also is given to pious souls by God, that being devoted to Him, He often secretly, and even without their becoming aware of it, impels them to this or that good action."—*Starke.*

"Is not this the very way in which our rich Kinsman deals with those whom He loves and saves? . . . He calls poor fainting sinners to come without doubt or fear, and take their place among the company of the redeemed; for everything is there provided which they can need—abounding grace for abounding sin. He ministers Himself to their secret wants. He reaches forth with His own hand the parched corn of His sacrifice for them. And in this secret, personal, divine ministration, they eat and are sufficed."—*Tyng* (condensed).

"'Oh! but,' says one, 'how can it be? I am a stranger.' Yes, a stranger; but Jesus Christ loves the stranger. 'A publican, a sinner;' but He is 'the Friend of publicans and sinners.' 'An outcast;' but He 'gathereth together the outcasts of Israel.' 'A stray sheep;' but the shepherd 'leaves the ninety and nine,' to seek it. 'A lost piece of money,' but He 'sweeps the house' to find it. 'A prodigal son;' but He sets the bells a-ringing when He knows that thou wilt return. Come, Ruth! Come, trembling gleaner! Jesus invites thee; accept the invitation. 'At meal-time come thou hither, and eat of the bread, and dip thy morsel in the vinegar."—*Spurgeon.*

"We must not look upon this as being some sour stuff. No doubt there are crabbed souls in the Church, who always dip their morsel in the sourest imaginable vinegar, and with a grim liberality invite others to share a little comfortable misery with them; but the vinegar in my text is altogether another thing. This was either a compound of various sweets expressed from fruits, or else it was that weak kind of wine mingled with water which is still commonly used in the harvest-fields of Italy and the warmer parts of the world—a drink not exceedingly strong, but excellently cooling, and good enough to impart a relish to the reapers' food."—*Ibid.*

"You may suspect some danger nigh when your delights are overflowing. If you see a

ship taking in great quantities of provision, it is bound for a distant port. And when God gives you extraordinary seasons of communion with Jesus, you may look for long leagues of tempestuous sea. Sweet cordials prepare for stern conflicts. Times of refreshing also occur *after* trouble or arduous service. Christ was tempted of the devil, and *afterwards* angels came and ministered unto Him. Jacob wrestled with God, and then afterwards, at Mahanaim, hosts of angels met him. Abraham wars with the kings, and returns from their slaughter; then it is that Melchisedec refreshes him with bread and wine. After conflict, content; after battle, banquet. When thou hast waited on thy Lord, then thou shalt sit down, and thy Master will gird Himself and wait upon thee."—*Ibid.*

VERSES 15—17.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.—Ver. 15. **And when she was risen up.** Evident from this and the previous phrase that Boaz said, "Come thou hither," as he himself sat among his reapers at the mid-day meal. So that a pause may be understood between the first conversation, ending with ver. 13, and the invitation itself, during which Ruth goes on with her gleaning. Then there is the rest lasting throughout the hour of meals, in the tent or house for the reapers, followed by fresh toil until the evening. **Commanded his young men.** He had charged them already not to touch her (ver. 9). **Let her glean even among the sheaves.** She may also glean between the sheaves (*Keil*). A rare privilege, not allowed to ordinary gleaners (*Steele and Terry*); and a still greater concession than that in ver. 9—"after the reapers." **And reproach her not.** (Heb. shame her not); μὴ καταισχύνητε (LXX.). Ye shall not shame her [do her any injury (Jud. xviii. 7)] (*Keil*). In other words, they were not to say things to her which would make her blush (*Lange*), not to remind her of her poverty, etc.

Ver. 16. **And let fall also of the handfuls.** Let fall also out of your armfuls that you have reaped (*Vulg.*). Pull out from the bundles (*Lange*). Ye shall also draw out of the bundles for her (*Keil*). It is necessary to distinguish carefully between "the sheaves" (ver. 15) and the "handfuls." The former is the sheaf already bound by the maidservants, and lying on the ground; the latter is the bundle as taken up and still held in the arm. *manipulus* (*Lange*). **And leave them.** Let them lie (*Keil*). **And rebuke her not.** Scold her not (*Lange, Keil*). These directions of Boaz went far beyond the bounds of generosity and compassion for the poor, and show that he felt a peculiar interest in Ruth, with whose circumstances he was well acquainted, and who had won his heart by her humility, etc.,—a fact important to notice in connection with the further course of the history (*Keil*).

Ver. 17. **And beat out.** ἐῤῥάβδισεν (LXX.). With a stick (*Wordsworth*). A process often witnessed by modern travellers in the East (*Steele and Terry*). **About an ephah of barley.** About a bushel and a half (*ibid.*). About twenty to twenty-five lbs. (*Keil*). Impossible to ascertain the quantity, still less its weight, exactly, but it was considerable, say fifty-five pounds (*Lange*). About eight gallons; see Exod. xvi. 36 (*Wordsworth*). She had gleaned so much, she could not carry it home in the ear (*ibid.*). **An ephah** exactly equal to an English cubic foot (*Conder*). The quantity of manna contained by the ephah was sufficient for ten men (cf. Exod. xvi. 16, with ver. 36).

VERSES 15, 16.

Theme.—LIBERAL GIVING, LIKE GOD'S.

"And the more thou spendest
From thy little store;
With a double bounty,
God shall give thee more."

"Thrice happy man! enabled to pursue
What all so wish, but want the power to do!"—*Pope.*

And when she was risen up to glean, Boaz commanded his young men, saying, Let her glean among, etc., and reproach her [shame her] *not. And let fall, etc., and rebuke* [scold] *her not.*

Rested, refreshed, invigorated with food, as well as comforted by the kind words of the master of the harvest-field, Ruth evidently rises to her labour with new pleasure and fresh earnestness. Note. (*a*) *The poor can appreciate and respond to all this, without presuming upon it, or without being encouraged to idleness.* Kindness to the deserving is a stimulus, an incentive to fresh enterprise and

diligence. (*b*) *The true use of rest and food is to strengthen us for resuming our toil.*

Again, mark how *the diligent hand obtains new and ever-increasing favours.* God's law is, to him that hath shall be given, and labour is the appointed way of increase, from which even Paradise itself was not exempted (Gen. ii. 15). He who would have must get, and he who would have much, must get diligently. We are all gleaners, and the world is our harvest-field; and productive gleaning is, and always has been, to the earnest and the industrious. God helps us, both in spiritual and temporal things; but He in no way does so with a desire to do away with human responsibility. He scatters His blessings around us, but we ourselves must gather and make them our own. His giving is never intended to abate our diligence. Boaz here gives from pure goodness and nobleness of heart, and therefore his benevolence is a type of the divine and perfect giving of God.

I. He gives unexpectedly. This is seen in two ways: (1) *He allows her to "glean among the sheaves,"* in a place where her labour will be more productive. So the Divine hand, in reward for past diligence, and as a proof of present favour, leads men to new spheres and employments, more fertile, as well as more dignified and productive. Joseph is exalted in Egypt, and David in Israel, and Paul among the apostles. Note. *It is lawful to extend favours more to one than another* (*Fuller*), in those things which are free favours (*ibid.*), in those things which are our own (Matt. xx. 15), as with Boaz here. So with the Divine grace, and those privileges and opportunities God bestows in a seemingly unequal way among men. He gives and rewards not without a meaning, and not without a reason—this were impossible with Him; but He will be accountable to no man for His dealings with the most highly favoured among men. The answer of sovereign grace to the caviller is, and always must be, "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own?" "Is thine eye evil?" etc.

(2) *He charges his reapers to scatter handfuls for her.* He increases her gleanings, and yet makes it appear the fruit of her own industry (*Thomson*). [See on ver. 8, 9, div. I., p. 108.] And in our own lives how often God has given (*a*) beyond our fondest anticipations, and (*b*) in ways which seem the result of our own thrift and endeavours. [Examples: Jacob in Laban's household; Daniel in Babylon.] We say, in our short-sightedness, possibly, that our own hand and our own wisdom has gained us all this increase; but is it so?

II. He gives liberally. Nowhere have the poor been cared for so liberally as among the Jews (*Baldwin Brown*). The law made it a sacred duty not to reap "wholly the corners of the field," etc. (Lev. xix. 9, 10), but to leave something behind for the destitute and the stranger. Boaz, however, goes beyond his creed; and so Ruth, who expected to gather a little, gathers abundantly. This is the Divine idea, "good measure, pressed down, running over;" not the giving with a niggardly spirit and a grudging hand, but largely, overflowingly, beyond that which is due, beyond that which is expected or even deserved. (1) *So good men give.* They live to bestow happiness. Riches are lent, not given, and bring the purest pleasure when scattered around upon the worthy and the necessitous. Wealth—

> "By disburdening grows
> More fruitful, which instructs us not to spare."—*Milton.*

So God gives (*a*) largely, (*b*) liberally, (*c*) lavishly, (*d*) constantly. Note. *He can make the world, to every one of us, a harvest-field, full of temporal and spiritual blessings.*

III. He gives without reproach and without rebuke. His reapers are only his agents in this matter; the master's will is to control all. An alien, and a daughter of the sinful race of Moab, shall glean in the choicest portions of his harvest-field, shielded from prejudice, and without a single word to remind her of her poverty, or her unworthiness (as some would think it), or of the unexpected

favour bestowed upon her. A word to a delicate, sensitive spirit like that she has displayed would spoil all; therefore rebuke her not. Note. *Kindness shows itself not only in doing good, but also in preventing evil and reproach.* How exactly all this corresponds to the Divine dealings with sinful men! When they come in humble, suppliant attitude, it is said, "None of their sins shall be mentioned unto them." God shields from shame, as well as bestows pardon, and sovereign grace is always willing to blot out the past. The inspired conception of the Divine benevolence is that He "giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not" (James i. 5).

Again, God charges others, lest they should reproach the sensitive and the tender-hearted among His children (Isa. xl. 1, 2; lxv. 25), as well as the wanderer and the stranger who cast themselves on His protecting care. The Saviour's disciples were reapers in a field "white unto the harvest," and yet, when they would have rebuked others who were not "of them," He said, "Forbid them not" (Matt. ix. 39).

IV. He gives in encouragement of her own labours. The kindness of Boaz suited (1) *to her situation*, (2) *to her employment* as a gleaner in the harvest-field. So God gives *in kind* as well as in degree, according to our present capacity. He gives along the lines we ourselves are laying down—a solemn yet certain truth—and according to the spirit and diligence we ourselves are displaying. He gives "wood and hay and stubble" to such as are seeking such; the pure and precious grain of the kingdom only to those whom He is certain have sought, and sought diligently, for the same.

IMPROVEMENT. (1) Charity, wisely directed, will not tempt the poor to idleness (*Lawson*). (2) If we come into fellowship with God, He will protect our characters from shame (*E. Price*), as well as our lives from want. We are to do our duty, and leave the rest with Him. When led into danger, we are to go quietly on, trusting to His guidance, as well as to our own integrity.

"The end of feeding is to fall to our calling. Let us not therefore, with Israel, sit down to eat and to drink, and so rise up to play; but let us eat to live, not live to eat. We need not make the clay cottage of our body much larger than it is by immoderate feeding: it is enough if we maintain it so with competent food, that God, our Landlord, may not have just cause to sue us for want of reparations."—*Fuller.*

"That bird was once a woman, and it is a good lesson she reads us. One day she was kneading bread in her trough, under the eaves of her house, when our Lord passed by, leaning on St. Peter. She did not know it was the Saviour and His apostle, for they looked like two poor men travelling past her door. 'Give us of your dough, for the love of God,' said the Lord Christ: 'we have come far across the field, and have fasted long.' Gertrude pinched off a small piece for them; but on rolling it in her trough, to get it into shape, it grew and grew, and filled up the trough completely. She looked at it in wonder. 'No,' said she, 'that is more than you want;' so she pinched off a smaller piece, and rolled it out as before; but the smaller piece filled up the trough, just as the other had done; so she put that aside too, and pinched a smaller bit still. But the miracle was just as apparent, the smaller bit filling up the trough the same as ever. Gertrude's heart was hardened still more; she put that aside also. 'I cannot give you any to-day,' said she; for the greed of her heart was to divide all her dough into little bits and roll it into loaves. 'Go on your journey, and the Lord prosper you.' Then the Lord Christ was angry, and her eyes were opened, and she fell down on her knees to hear Him say, 'I gave you plenty, but that hardened your heart, so that plenty was not a blessing to you; I will try you now with the blessing of poverty; you shall henceforth seek your food day by day, and always between the wood and the bark.'"—*Norwegian Legend of the Gertrude Bird.*

"We learn, that is the best charity which so relieves people's wants as that they are still continued in their calling. For, as he who teacheth one to swim, though haply he will take him by the chin, yet he expecteth that the learner shall nimbly ply the oars of his hands and feet, and strive and struggle with all his strength to keep himself above water; so those who are beneficial to poor people may justly require of them that they use both their hands to work and feet to go in their calling, and themselves take all due labour that they may not sink in the gulf of penury. Relieve a husbandman, yet so as he may still continue in his husbandry; a tradesman, yet so he may still go on in his trade; a poor scholar, yet so he may still proceed in his studies. Thereby the commonwealth shall be a gainer. Drones bring no honey to the hive; but the painful hand of each private man contributes some profit to the public good. Hereby the able poor, the more diligent they be,

the more bountiful men will be to them; while their bodies are freed from many diseases, their souls from many sins, whereof idleness is the mother Laziness makes a breach in our soul, where the devil doth assault us with greatest advantage; and when we are most idle in our vocations, then he is most busy in his temptations.'—*Fuller.*

"There can be no wrong in those things which are free favours. I am not less just to him to whom I give less, but I am more merciful to him to whom I give more. . . . Shall it not therefore be lawful for the Lord of heaven to bestow wealth, honour, wisdom, effectual grace, blessings outward and inward, on one, and deny them to another? You, therefore, whom God hath suffered to glean among the sheaves, and hath scattered whole handfuls for you to gather; you that abound and flow with His favours, be heartily thankful unto Him. He hath not dealt so with everyone, neither have all such a large measure of His blessings."—*Fuller.*

"I know some preachers who never went to Martin Luther's school; they may have prayer and meditation, but they have never been schooled by temptation; and if we are not much tempted ourselves, if we are not emptied from vessel to vessel ourselves, we are in very great danger, when we are dealing with these Ruths, lest we be hard with them, and rebuke and reproach them, when instead thereof we should hear the Master say, 'Comfort ye, comfort ye my people; speak ye comfortably unto Jerusalem.' Now I take it that we do very much reproach these tender ones *when we set up standards in our ministry to which we tell them they must come or else perish.*"—*Spurgeon.*

"But then, brethren, you will notice that these reapers were to let handfuls fall *on purpose for her.* Well, then, ye reapers in God's field, let your preaching be very *personal.* Oh! I love, when I draw the bow, not to do it at a venture, but to single out some troubled heart, and speak to you all as though there were but one here; not pouring the oil over the wound, but coming up to the edge of the gaping sore to pour *in* oil and wine. These poor Ruths will not dare to take the corn unless we put it right in their way. They are so faithful, so timorous, that though it seems to be scattered for everybody, they think it cannot be for them: but if it be *there*, put *there* so that they cannot mistake it, then they say, 'Well, that is for me; ay, that is what *I* have felt; that is what *I* want;' and they cannot, unbelieving though they be, they cannot help stooping down and picking up the handful that is let fall *on purpose* for them. Then, if it be so, our preaching must always be very *affectionate.*'—*Ibid.*

"Dr Manton once preached in St. Paul's Cathedral, and a great crowd went to listen to him. A poor man, who had walked fifty miles to hear the good doctor, afterwards plucked him by the sleeve, and said, 'There was nothing for me this morning.' The doctor had preached a very learned sermon, full of Greek and Latin quotations which the poor countryman could not understand; but the doctor had not expected him, and there was nothing for him. I think there should always be in our ministry some things for poor Ruth, so plain and so simple, that the wiseacres will turn up their noses, and say, 'What platitudes!' Never mind, if Ruth gets a handful of corn, our Master at the last shall know who did His errand best, and served Him with a perfect heart."—*Ibid.*

"While such a practice as is here enjoined would have been dishonest and unfaithful without the express authority of the master, not to have done it after it was enjoined would have been undutiful in its turn."—*Thomson.*

'Doubtless Boaz, having taken notice of the good nature, dutiful carriage, and the near affinity of Ruth, could not but purpose some greater beneficence and higher respects to her; yet how he fits his kindness to her condition, and gives her that which to her seemed much, though he thought it little. Thus doth the bounty of our God deal with us. It is not for want of love that he gives us no greater measure of grace, but for want of our fitness and capacity. He hath reserved greater preferments for us, when it shall be seasonable for us to receive them.'—*Bishop Hall.*

VERSE 17.

Theme.—LABOUR UNTIL THE EVENING.

"When the corn's rustle on the ear doth come,
When the eve's beetle sounds its drowsy hum,
When the stars, dewdrops of the summer sky,
Watch over all with soft and loving eye."—*Nicoll.*

"Night is the time for rest;
How sweet, when labours close,
To gather round an aching breast
The curtain of repose,
Stretch the tired limbs, and lay the head
Upon our own delightful bed."—*J. Montgomery.*

So she gleaned in the fields until even, and beat out, etc.

The longest and most eventful day must come to a close at last. So with

this of Ruth's toil, and the beginning of her recompense. (1) *She was not weary in well doing.* (2) She *did not presume* upon the fact that Boaz had so greatly and so generously increased her gleanings. No! She perseveres in her labour of love until the due and proper hour for retiring; then, pleased with what she had gained by her own industry, and careful to secure it, she lingers to beat out the corn, instead of taking it where it might trouble Naomi—a thoughtfulness surpassing even that of most natural children to their parents.

Learn, as suggested here—

I. That it is good to abide where we do well. Boaz had charged her not to glean in another field, but to stand fast by his maidens (ver. 8), and here is the result. She reaped the fruit of her constancy; (1) a lesson *to the unstable in temporal things.* Prosperity only follows persevering labour. It is the diligent hand that maketh rich; "the rolling stone gathers no moss" (*Braden*). (2) *To the unstable in the kingdom of God*—men who wander from one church to another, from one preacher to another, from one sphere of duty to another. Note. *Every man has his appropriate place:* the aim of life should be first to find it and then to keep it.

II. That it is good to labour where God sends success. Can Ruth return to the city with a dejected countenance? Never, while Jehovah lives (*E. Price*). And why? Evident that she was in the place God had appointed for her. We misread the whole narrative, too, if we fail to see that Boaz is only an instrument in the Divine hands. In all labour, even that of gleaning, there is profit; but see what gleaning is when God guides to the harvest field! The humblest toil then becomes not only productive, but beautiful, and pregnant with after consequences.

III. That it is good to toil on until God's appointed time of rest. "Man goeth forth to his labour until the evening." There is a time, then, for going forth, and there is also a time for returning. The day for toil, the night for repose, this is God's great appointed law. Labour is man's heritage (Gen. ii. 15), and we are happy only as we bow to this. Life, health, man's physical and moral well-being depend upon obedience. But mark! *Labour, too, has its boundaries, the time when it must end;* and from this thought comes a *stimulus* to which even the great Master Himself responded, "I must work the works of Him that sent me, while it is *day*," as well as a *hope* which looks forward to rest and reward when toil is over. Note. *Rest time is not waste time* (*Spurgeon*). The pause prepares mind and body alike for further service.

"King Alphonsus doing something with his hands, and labouring so, as some which beheld him found fault, smiled and said, 'Hath God given hands to kings in vain?'" —*Bernard.*

"I do not like to see a Christian man too eager for holidays, nor doling out his services in exact and precise proportion to his wages, bitterly complaining if he is requested to do a little more than is in 'the bond,' ready to fling down his tools before the first stroke of the clock has fairly struck which tells that the day's work may cease. A man should be in love with his work, and should take as the mottoes for his inspiration the words, 'Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do,' etc., 'Not slothful in business, fervent in spirit,' etc."—*Braden.*

"Sarah kneaded cakes; Rachel fed sheep; Rebekah drew water; Tamar baked cakes. Suetonius reporteth of Augustus Cæsar, that he made his daughters to learn to spin; and Pantaelon relates the same of Charles the Great. Yet now-a-days (such is the pride of the world) people of far meaner quality scorn so base employments."—*Fuller.*

"Such diligence is supremely praiseworthy, and deserves, nay, ensures an abundant reward. It is a great thing in life to be wholly devoted to the work we have in hand, and to be able to say, 'This one thing I do.' For there is an incalculable multitude of people who are 'everything by turns and nothing long.' Shifty, changeful, dissatisfied, untrustworthy, they pass from one occupation to another with the ease and rapidity with which the wind veers round all the points of the compass; busy, fussy folk who are excited, enthusiastic about one thing to-day, and equally excited and enthusiastic about another and totally opposite thing to-morrow. All they undertake is regarded of the same importance, to be entered upon with unrestrained vigour; but nothing prospers that they touch, because they *only* touch it, and soon it droops and fades."—*Braden.*

"Seek a retentive memory, to keep in thy hand what thou hast gathered, or else thou wilt be like a silly gleaner who stoops to glean one ear, and drops another at the same time. Carry home what of truth thou canst. Take notes in thy heart. And when thou hast gathered and hast thy hands full, take care to discriminate. Ruth, we are told, threshed her corn, and left the straw behind, and took home the good wheat. Do thou the same."—*Spurgeon.*

"Corn, even the finest kidney of the wheat, grows encompassed with chaff, and therefore must be beaten out and winnowed before it is fit for use. . . . Paul, that incomparable preacher, freely confessed that he saw and prophesied but in part: if he in part, surely we in a very little part; consequently much of our own chaff is mixed with our Redeemer's wheat: and that you our hearers are called to beat out what you glean, by a diligent search of the Scriptures, by meditation and prayer."—*Macgowan.*

"The materials of the temple were so hewed and carved, both stone and wood, before that they were brought unto Jerusalem, that there was not so much as the noise of a hammer heard in the temple. So Ruth fits all things in a readiness before she goes home, that so no noise might be made at home, to disturb her aged mother."—*Fuller.*

VERSES 18—23.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.—**Her mother-in law saw.** With astonishment at the quantity evidently. **And she brought forth.** And she showed (*Vulgate, Syr.-Arab., Wright, Lange*). Brought forth out of a wallet (*Targum*). Drew out of her pocket, as the Chaldee has correctly supplied (*Keil*). **That she had reserved.** Of the parched corn (see ver. 14). **After she was sufficed.** Satisfied (*Lange*). Lit. From her satiety (*Morison*).

Ver. 19. **Where wroughtest thou?** Where didst thou procure? (*Dr. Cassel*). Where hast thou stayed? (*Wright*). Where strayedest thou? (*Gesen*). As in EV. LXX. Vulg. Rosen. Bertheau. **Blessed be he.** Naomi seems to have seen at once that someone must have treated Ruth with unexpected and unwonted kindness. Did take knowledge. Friendly and special notice. The same word used by Ruth (ver. 10) in expressing her gratitude to Boaz (*Lange*). **With whom I wrought.** Certainly a better translation than "with whom I spent my time," as Wright would appear to propose. Boaz. She could not know what a consolation and joy the utterance of this name conveyed to Naomi (*Lange*).

Ver. 20. **Who hath not left off.** Precisely the same expression Eliezer uses when he meets Rebekah, after having prayed for guidance (Gen. xxiv. 27). There, however, it is Jehovah Himself who is pronounced "blessed" (*Speaker's Com.*). Naomi possibly only applied a general formula or even a common proverb to her special case, and in this sense Jehovah alone is to be seen as the source of kindness to the living and the dead. So the Syriac, Arab., Bertheau, Keil, Lange, &c. The Chaldee, LXX., and Vulg. apply the words, however, to Boaz. [See on ch. i, 8, and also cf. Gen. xiv. 19; Ps. cxv. 15.] **To the living and the dead.** Here is a profession of faith in the existence of the faithful after death (*Wordsworth*). Not so (*Bertheau, Morison*). If these words do not presuppose the immortality of the soul as an article of Israelitish faith, what meaning can they have? (*Lange*). God is not the God of the dead [those who have passed away and are no more for ever] but of the living (Matt. xxii. 32). Ruth is still the wife of the dead in the Hebrew way of thinking and speaking (iv. 5). And does not this and kindred Jewish notions as to the dead having claims upon the living, receiving kindnesses from them, having seed raised up by them, &c., necessarily point to an underlying conviction of the continuing existence of those who have only passed away to the outward senses and sight? **The man is near of kin.** Is our relative (*Keil*). Lit. Near, not in comparison with other relatives, but with men in general (*Lange*). One of our next kinsmen. One of our redeemers (*Lange, Keil*). One that hath a right to redeem (*Kitto*). The second in the order of the Goëlim (*Michaelis, Gesenius*). The Redeemer had a right (1) of redeeming the inheritance of the person, (2) of marrying the widow, (3) of avenging the death (*Speaker's Com.*). Cf. Lev. xxv. 25-31, 47-55; Deut. xxv. 5-10, xix. 1-13; Jer. xxxii. 8-12.

Ver. 21. **He said unto me also.** Even so may he be blessed (*Carpzov, Wordsworth, Wright*). Not so (*Lange*). Yea also he said to me (*Morison*). More! I have not told you all, for he said, &c. (*Lange*). **Keep fast by my young men.** My people (*Keil*). My servants (*Lange*). The people also belong to my house as distinguished from the people of other masters (*Keil*). The masculine here to be taken as including both sexes (*Gesen, Furst, Maurer*). Boaz (ver. 3) and Naomi (ver. 22), however, use the feminine form, which seems to show that the distinction of gender was no longer neglected (*Lange*). A special point is made of Ruth being allowed to glean among the sheaves close to the reapers (ver. 15), that is, the young men, evidently a special and privileged place. The young men had a commission, too, from their master to countenance and encourage her (ver. 16).

Ver. 22. **It is good.** The key to much which follows as well as an approval of what has passed. **That they meet thee not.** Lit., that they do not fall upon thee (*Keil, Wordsworth*). Originally means to light upon, whether for good or evil (*Morison*). Keil views the verb, how-

ever, as having only a bad meaning, and as signifying to fall upon a person to smite and ill-treat him. Fall not upon thee, or solicit thee to folly. *Vulgo dicitur castam esse quam nemo rogarit* (*Trapp*). In a strange field she would be exposed to annoyances and, possibly, insults (*Steele and Terry*), from which Boaz has specially guarded her in his (ver. 9, 15, 16). To go elsewhere also would be to show a want of appreciation for the kind words and actions of which she has been the recipient already. Her seemingly needless repetition of this idea of clinging to the fields and servants of Boaz, is, indeed, highly artistic, and serves to prepare the mind for what is to follow.

Ver. 23. **So she kept fast.** And she kept gleaning along with the maiden of Boaz (*Wright*) (cf. v. 9; 21). Gives the opportunity for Boaz to acquire that knowledge of Ruth and respect for her implied in iii. 10, 11). **By the maidens.** Showing clearly that his maidens were only gleaners (*Speaker's Com.*). **Unto the end of barley and wheat harvest.** Until about the beginning of June. The two harvests would cover from two to three months. **And dwelt with her mother-in-law.** After she returned to her mother-in-law (*Vulg., Luther, Coverdale*). And lived with her mother-in-law (*Kiel*). A tacit allusion to the fact that a change took place when the harvest was over (*ibid*). She did not gad abroad, but kept her aged mother company at home (*Patrick*).

VERSE 18.

Theme.—THE BREAD-WINNER AND HER PRECIOUS BURDEN.

"Find out men's wants and will
And meet them there. All worldly joys go less
To the one joy of doing kindnesses."—*Herbert.*

And she took it up . . . . . and she brought forth, and gave, etc.

Ruth *returns* to the city, bearing herself the results of her toil, but not for herself alone. True affection is always carrying some burden or other, and love's crosses are never her own entirely.

She *returns to bestow of her labour.* The needy may often play the benefactor to others. Christ carried a bag to relieve those who were in want, and the poor widow had still "two mites to spare" (Luke xxi. 2). How the text condemns the covetousness of such as Nabal, who have plenty and yet give not out of their abundance!

I. She was frugal. Carefulness as necessary as industry. That nothing be lost for want of frugality comes with the force of Divine authority. "Gather up the fragments," etc. Wisdom teaches us to have an eye upon the future as upon the present. Even dumb creatures, like the ant and the bee, have this instinct. Note. *Wastefulness as much a sin as idleness.*

II. She was frugal amid unexpected abundance. A contrast to such as plunge into mad riot and wanton, reckless wastefulness at such times. The prodigal, when he had obtained his "portion," made all haste to spend it among harlots. Must be confessed that the poor are not always the most careful when fortune favours them. "Beggars on horseback ride the faster to the devil." Note. *A true test of character to be found here.*

"Who cannot live on twenty pound a-year,
Cannot on forty; he's a man of pleasure,
A kind of thing that's for itself too dear."—*Herbert.*

III. She was frugal for the sake of others. The thought of Naomi at home had evidently stimulated her to carefulness as well as industry in the harvest-field. Ruth not one lost in vacant reveries and so missing the hour of service. The spirit of love and self-sacrifice breathes in all that she does. Note. (*a*) *Extravagance is especially reprehensible when there may be those in want at home.* Becomes doubly a sin then to waste, or to neglect opportunities of providing for them. (*b*) *A kindred thoughtfulness to Ruth's not unusual among the poor.* Only that while the good deeds of the rich are concealed with difficulty, theirs are too often passed by unnoticed. How many a heart has thrilled with joy at the thought of being able to minister to the joy of those at home! Burns gives us

the picture of the eldest daughter, in his "Cotter's Saturday Night," bringing home

"her sair-won penny fee
To help her parents dear, if they in hardship be."

Ministries like this have gladdened and sweetened family life all the world over. Note. *Men may and ought to find the sweetest and noblest use of all their gains at home.*

LESSONS. (1) Even love must have its burden, if it would enjoy its after-recompense and approval. There are who would scatter without first having gathered, but that is not God's law. (2) The lavishness of this evening hour only follows the gleaning and carefulness of the day. (3) What is gained in a nook of the harvest-field comes to be seen and reported in the city (*Price*).

"They come home from their busy toil feeling that they have the day's sweetest and not always lightest task before them—to lighten the hearts and gladden the lives of those whom they love best. Whatever the world has done *to* them or *for* them they have one thing to do—to do the very best they can for the dear ones round their fireside. Not that these are to be kept always ignorant of the cares, troubles, and losses without which the world's business cannot be carried on."—*Baldwin Brown.*

"See here, the shoulders of God's saints are wonted to the bearing of burthens. Little Isaac carried the faggot wherewith himself was to be sacrificed; our Saviour, His own cross, till His faintness claimed Simeon of Cyrene to be His successor. Yet, let not God's saints be disheartened: if their Father had a 'bottle' wherein He puts the tears which they spend, surely He hath a balance wherein He weighs the burthens which they bear. He keeps a note to what weight their burthens amount, and, no doubt, will accordingly comfort them."—*Fuller.*

"It is no less necessary to be careful of the fruit of our labours, than to labour with diligence. Christ Himself, who could multiply bread at His pleasure, commanded the fragments of the barley loaves and fishes to be gathered up, that nothing might be lost. 'In all labour there is profit,' says the wise man; yet there are some that labour for the wind. They lose what they have wrought, because they suffer it, through their carelessness, to slip through their fingers. This folly, however, is much less frequent in things relating to the body than in those which relate to the soul."—*Lawson.*

"The Church is our mother, whom we are called to serve and comfort; therefore every comfort you glean ought to be brought home to her; so disposed of and applied that she may share in your pleasure."—*Macgowan.*

VERSE 19.

Theme.—HOME CONFIDENCES, MUTUAL CONFESSIONS, AND ENQUIRIES.

"And none can say but all my life
I have His wordis kept,
And summed the actions of the day
Each night before I slept."—*Chatterton.*

"Think nought a trifle, though it small appear—
Small sands the mountain, moments make the year,
And trifles life."—*Young.*

And her mother-in-law said, Where hast thou, etc. . . . Blessed be he, etc. . . . And she showed, etc.

It is in the very nature of affection to feel the interest, solicitude, anxiety expressed here. Parents see their children go out to the snares and difficulties of life. Will they be preserved spotless? etc. More, it is the duty of such to ascertain how their children have been employed, what associations they have formed, with whom and where they have been. *Such sympathetic questioning* (1) elicits confidence, (2) shows thoughtful interest, (3) offers opportunity for wise counsel and encouragement (*Braden*). Carelessness on these points (1) unnatural, (2) dangerous. Even Eli did not sin in neglecting this duty. He

noticed and enquired (1 Sam. ii. 23, 24). His sin was that he restrained not after knowledge (iii. 13).

But see how "love thinketh no evil," and makes even a duty like this free from whatever might be otherwise irksome or unpleasant. Naomi asks from a desire to know who was the instrument in God's hands through whom His bounty came, not from curiosity merely, or from any suspicion concerning Ruth. Favours bestowed naturally bring the desire to know from whom they come.

We have, **I. A fitting conclusion to a well-spent day.** Note. *Good to sum up the actions of the day* (1) to ourselves, (2) to others when convenient and proper, as here. "Confess your sins one to another." The New Testament idea of a confessor, however, not that of an official person, a "priest," but a friend whom we can trust and to whom we can unbosom, as Ruth evidently did to Naomi [cf. Mal. iii. 16; Judg. v. 11]. Especially is such confession one to another good when accompanied and permeated by a devout spirit such as breathes through the whole context. Note. *When integrity directs our steps there is no need for evasion.* Can give a minute account of our conduct.

II. A mutual stimulus and encouragement to gratitude. Gratitude kindles gratitude. Good deeds to ourselves, recognised and pointed out, bring thankfulness to other hearts beside our own, to the devout everywhere.

> "Whene'er a noble deed is wrought,
> Whene'er is spoken a noble thought,
> Our hearts in glad surprise
> To higher levels rise."—*Longfellow.*

Many men niggardly in letting it be known they have received favours. They would hide the sunshine which has gladdened life in their own hearts, were it possible. Not so Ruth. She brings to her home, and to her friend, these abundant signs and tokens of that which has made the labour of gleaning a light and pleasant task. Christ's command, "Return to thine own house," etc. (Luke v. 39), enforces the duty illustrated here.

It is, **III. A mutual stimulus and encouragement to piety.** The heart naturally looks upward and thanks God when it comes face to face with noble deeds of any kind. Men stifle the feeling if they can, it may be, and feel ashamed of it, but it is there. Note. *Thanksgiving as natural as prayer.*

Here the kindness of Boaz and the success of Ruth both come in to fan the flame of piety in the heart of Naomi. Her first thought is not that the wants of the morrow are satisfied, and that abundantly, but "Blessed be he," etc. True always that—

> "The tidal wave of deeper souls
> Into our inmost being rolls,
> And lifts us unawares
> Out of all meaner cares."

Noble deeds, when seen and realised, lead men almost unconsciously to think and to speak nobly. Note. *Prayer is sometimes the only possible way left us of expressing our gratitude.* [On these ejaculatory expressions see ch. ii. 12 pp. 116, 117.] The debt contracted in the currency of earth is paid back in the coin of heaven (*Thomson*).

IMPROVEMENT.—(1) We should take special notice of such as do us good (*Bernard*). (2) A good heart rejoices in the welfare of another (*ibid.*). (3) How naturally the name of God comes in on occasions like these! (4) How potent our kindness may be in quickening the sense of God's kindness (*Cox*).

E. Price on this:—God's Providence an excitement to a question. Wherever can such a blessing have come from? *to a benediction.* Blessed be God in the fact and in the agent of His will; *and to a recognition* of His inscrutable but merciful designs. Who can this man be—coming at the very time when needed—but a *Boaz*, and he the father of blessings yet beyond the present hour?

Observe.—A man may be as a stranger to-day, and yet God may cause him to appear an angel of blessedness to-morrow. Despise nothing—hope in everything, and unite the actions of life by the spirit of cheerfulness. *If* Providence be a fact, trust in it!

J. P. Allen, M.A., on this:—**Ruth ii. 19,** "*Where hast thou gleaned to-day?*" —A simple question is sometimes startling, and is often stirringly suggestive.

I. The Sphere: Life's opportunities.

(1) The law of labour is the law of life. In this world but little can be accomplished without energy and enterprise. In every department this is true.

(2) To the open and eager eye openings invite and opportunities multiply. "Let me now go to the field." "I have set before thee an open door." "The field is the world." See Isa. vi. 8.

(3) Forms of activity, how diversified they are. There is not only the reaper but the "gleaner" also. "All works are good, and each is best when most it pleases Thee." "Gather up the fragments," and despise not "the day of small things."

(4) Scope exists for all. "How many serve, how many more may to the service come." "Even I, in fields so broad, some duties may fulfil."—*Woman's* work.

(5) Each "day" brings its demands. "To-day."

II. The Service: Our use or neglect of life's opportunities.

(1) Neglect possible. There is no compulsion. The parable of the talents. The field of the slothful (Prov. xxiv).

(2) Success attainable. Satisfaction in healthful industry. Beneficent results are an "ephah of barley." "Neither man nor work unblest wilt thou Thou permit to be." "He shall doubtless come again bringing his sheaves with him." "Enter into the joy of thy Lord."

(3) Co-operation here desirable. "Let fall some for her." "Reproach her not." Community in labour. Unselfishly thinking of others and their work, without unkindliness or rebuke. Cp. moroseness and malevolence. "Each worker pleases where the rest he serves in charity."

III. The Scrutiny: Direct investigation into our use of life's opportunities.

(1) The "day," however, varying in incident and duration, soon "goeth away." "The shadows of the evening are stretched out." "The night cometh when no man can work."

(2) After that, the Tribunal and award. (a) The Fact of Judgment [cf. Matt. xxv. 19.] (b) Its characteristics (1) *Personal and individual:* "Those." (2) *Practical:* "Where." (3) *Precise:* each "day" and its doings. How wise to let the inquiry here anticipate the inquiry hereafter. Day by day and every day should conscience put the question—"Where hast thou gleaned to-day?"

"If we are not our brethren's, yet surely we are our children's keepers; and we know what a son Adonijah proved, that had never been chidden. Parents should examine their children, not to frighten nor discourage them, not so as to make them hate home or tempt them to tell a lie, but to commend them if they have done well, and with mildness to reprove and caution them if they have done otherwise." —*Matthew Henry.*

"It is a good question for us to ask ourselves in the close of every day, 'Where have I gleaned to-day? What improvements have I made in knowledge and grace? What have I done or obtained that will turn to a good account?'"

"Sum up at night what thou hast done by day;
And in the morning what thou hast to do.
Dress and undress thy soul: mark the decay
And growth of it: if with thy watch, that too
Be down, then wind up both; since we shall be
Most surely judged, make thy accounts agree." —*Herbert.*

"Spirits rest in duty, in the interchange of the communications and ministries of thought and love."—*Baldwin Brown.*

"The recording of these small matters showeth how dear to God are His saints, and how He is taken with everything they say or do, if not sinful."—*Trapp.*

"They are rich who have friends. There is no living without friends."—*Portuguese Proverbs*

"And whether a man be poor or rich, caressed of fortune or crushed under difficulties, if he be homeless in this sense, if he have no loved ones caring *for him* and not for his substance, sympathizing in his trials and rejoicing in his successes, the veriest dog that has a kennel to creep in out of the cold wind at nights, is to be envied more than he."—B.

"Piety, however, does more than indulge in curiosity. The natural heart would have rejoiced, received, enjoyed, and inquired just as Naomi did, but withal with no thought except of self. She, on the contrary, before her inquiries are answered, induced simply by the abundance of the gifts and the manifest happiness of Ruth, blesses the giver."—*Lange.*

"The blessings of grace also are scattered abroad in the gospel field in the greatest abundance, but they must all be gathered in a diligent use of the appointed means. Sovereign grace could, if infinite wisdom saw meet, save its object without the intervention of means; and so might Boaz have given Ruth the handfuls unscattered, but he did not choose to do that, neither does grace choose to do this. God has therefore bound His people to as strict, as conscientious a use of the means, as if upon them only salvation was entirely dependent. . . . What He gives in a way of sovereign goodness must be gathered in the way of the strictest diligence."—*Macgowan.*

"If the rich can exchange their alms with the poor for blessings, they have no cause to complain of an ill bargain. Our gifts cannot be worth their faithful prayers: therefore it is better to give than receive; because he that receives hath a worthless alms: he that gives receives an invaluable blessing."—*Bishop Hall.*

"If we would but recollect that life is a mosaic, made up of very little things, and that the very smallest and meanest well done, is as thankworthy as the greatest."—*Anon.*

"Before even her question can be answered, and moved simply by the manifest happiness of Ruth in the abundance of her gleanings, she 'blesses' the man who has given her this happiness. For this she does not need to know who he is. Whoever had been kind and bountiful to Ruth must have meant to show that he appreciated her virtues and felt for her misfortunes."—*Cox.*

"'For the last ten years I (Gambetta) have made a pledge with myself to entirely avoid introducing the name of God into any speech of mine. You can hardly believe how difficult it has been, but I have succeeded, *thank God!*' ('*Dieu merci!*'). Thus the name so sternly tabooed rose unconsciously to his lips at the very moment when he was congratulating himself on having overcome the habit of using it."—*E. D. Pressense.*

VERSE 20.

Theme.—KINDNESS TO THE LIVING AND THE DEAD.

"Those that he loved so long, and sees no more,
Loved and still loves—not dead, but gone before."—*Rogers.*

"The dead are like the stars by day,
Withdrawn from mortal eye,
Yet holding unperceived their way
Through the unclouded sky."—*Bernard.*

Blessed be he of the Lord [Jehovah] *who hath not left off His kindness to the living and the dead.*

It is just possible these words apply entirely to Boaz. New favours cause a fresh remembrance of former courtesies (*Fuller*). Memory is busy, and Naomi may see in the kindness of to-day only a continuance of similar acts to the dead Elimelech done years ago. If so, she recognises in this the habit and spirit of his life. The new benefactor is the benefactor of old. He "hath not left off," &c. Note. *Benevolence grows upon men.* One deed of charity leads to another, fosters the spirit, forms, or helps to form, the habit. Characteristic of a good man that he has not "left off" those deeds of kindness which bring down life-long blessings and benedictions upon him [cf. Job xxxi. 16-2; xxix. 11-16.] While some give from impulse merely, and others from ostentation, he gives from a heart permeated by the spirit of love, and so he is always ready to respond to

the wants of those around him. Note. *What a noble and spontaneous testimony to the worth of Boaz*, if the words are to be so employed and applied.

Again, the phrase is a very significant one as to the whole action and scope of the book. Among the Hebrews kindness to the widow, duties performed to and for the bereaved were looked upon as *done to and for the dead.* This one of the fixed ideas in Naomi's mind seemingly hopeless at first [see on i. 11-13; p. 46] as to any outward accomplishment, but now to be seen as beginning to shape itself in another way. Note. *There is a sense in which we may be kind to the dead*—to his memory, to his loved one [see on ch. i. 9, p. 40; Fuller's remarks.]

The very close relationship, however, between the name of Jehovah and the following sentence seems to intimate that it is the Divine Mercy as bestowed upon the living and the dead which is filling her heart with a gratitude not to be concealed [cf. Crit. and Exegetical Notes.] She thinks of God, not so much of Boaz as the author of this new kindness. It is, "Jehovah who hath not," &c. Note. Naomi recognizes this even more profoundly than Eliezer. (Gen. xxiv, 26.) (Lange.)

May be looked upon if taken in this way. **I. In the sense of the unbroken continuance of the Divine favour throughout the ages,** to children, and children's children. He is the God of Abraham *and* of Isaac, *and* of Jacob. He blesses Ruth to-day, even as He blessed her husband yesterday. To each new generation there is this revelation of new mercies, for He is the God of each "succeeding race." Men there are whose charitable deeds are as rare as an eclipse or a blazing star *(Fuller).* Not so with Him. He ceaseth not. "He hath not left off," &c.

Note. *The pious have recognised this in all ages.* Moses saw Him as, keeping covenant to a thousand generations (Deut. vii. 9) and as, "the dwelling-place" of His people in *all* generations (Ps. xc. 1). David conceived Him as keeping mercy for ever (Ps. lxxxix. 28), and as not suffering His "faithfulness to fail" (33). Isaiah speaks of Him as hearing and preserving and establishing His own (Is. xlix. 8). Jeremiah says, "His compassions fail not—they are new every morning" (Lam. iii. 22, 23). This unchanging faithfulness and compassion of God (1) *Comes from the Divine Nature* (Is. xlix.; 1 Cor. i. 9; 1 Thes. v. 24). (2) *Endures with the Divine existence* [cxlvi. 3]. (3) *Shows itself in the Divine action* at all times.

It may be looked upon **II. In that completer sense in which God controls the unseen world as well as this.** The dead are with Him even as the living are, and this thought may possibly have been in Naomi's mind. For how can mercy be shown to such as exist no longer? *(Lange).* Would never occur to speak of that as mercy [kindness] to the dead, which is mercy to the living and nothing more (*Ibid*). [See Critical and Exeg. Notes, and Lange in loco]. Certainly the dead held a very conspicuous and important place in Naomi's speech and thoughts [cf. i. 8. 21], as well as in that of the Hebrews generally [iv. 5. 10]. And can we imagine this as side by side with the conception that they had *ceased to exist* for ever? To do so is to commit the error of the Sadducees, who erred, "*not knowing the Scriptures.*" All the light of subsequent revelation has not made the dead one whit more real to us, more clearly identified with ourselves, than we see them here. Why, then, refuse to believe that Naomi saw her loved ones as resting even then in Abraham's bosom? Where otherwise is the force of Christ's appeal (Matt. xxii. 31, 32), "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living?"

Blessed thought if taught here! He comforts us to-day, and He comforts those who are no longer with us but with Him. Death has not removed them from the sphere of His kindness. Separation from us does not necessarily mean separation from Him; rather it means, with the righteous, to come more completely within the scope of His love (Rev. xiv. 13). They serve and we serve (Rev. vi. 15). He feeds them (17) and He feeds us. He strengthens the heart

of the mourners here, and He wipes away all tears from their eyes yonder. He hath not left off, etc. Note. *The dead and the living are linked together still in the eyes of God and of good men.* Not so much two worlds as one, that the other side of this and God over all blessed for evermore. Parted only by a thin and perhaps, from their side, transparent veil (*Braden*).

LESSONS. (1) Kindness to the living may be, and is sometimes, kindness to the dead. (2) As health is the poor man's patrimony, so prayers are the poor man's requital (*Trapp*).

Bernard on "*Blessed be he of the Lord.*" (1) That prayer in and by every true member of the Church hath been only made unto God. (2) That it is the Lord who doth bless and make happy. (3) That the Lord will bless the merciful. (4) That the poor's reward unto the rich for their work of charity is only their prayer to God for them.

E. Price on this:—God's Blessing. (1) *In its nature*, it is "kindness"—the very soul of tenderness to the God-fearing among men. (2) *In its continuance.* He can't "leave off" making His children happy. (3) *In its application* to both worlds—to the "living" as the song of a *Ruth* may testify; to the "dead," as the hope of a *Naomi* must imply. Both are in the covenant of the God of Israel. And (4) *in its expression.* He knows how to prepare some lip to give it adequate expression before the world. The old shall ever confirm the faith of the young.

"It is kindness to the dead as well as to the living. The natural human protectors are gone, but the Almighty Father has taken their place. It is what Elimelech and Mahlon would have desired, and it is kindness to them. Can we not imagine that those who have passed from earth, leaving poor disconsolate ones behind to struggle with life's difficulties, often find, in their glorified condition, fresh and continuous reasons for rejoicing, because they see how the ever-watchful love of God is constantly shown towards beloved ones, whose comfort was their desire and endeavour?"—*Braden.*

"Though old Barzillai be incapable of thy favours, let young Chimham taste of thy kindness. Though the dead cannot, need not, have thy mercy, yet may they receive thy kindness by a proxy—by their friends that still are living.

"Mercy, then to the dead, makes nothing for the Popish purgatory, and yet no wonder if the Papists fight for it. . . . In a word, were purgatory taken away, the Pope himself would be in purgatory, as not knowing which way to maintain his expensiveness."—*Fuller.*

"Call upon the Almighty, He will help thee; thou needest not perplex thyself about anything else: shut thy eyes, and while thou art asleep, God will change thy bad fortune into good."—*Arabian Nights.*

"The Lord is the fountain from whom all blessedness flows. Indeed, Jacob blessed his sons; Moses, the twelve tribes; the priests, in the law, the people: but these were but the instruments, God the Principal; these the pipe, God the Fountain; these the ministers to pronounce it, God the author who bestowed it."—*Fuller.*

"The dead. So silent now. Never to come back for us to touch imperfectness into riper good; never to charm away with pleasant thoughts the dull hours; never to fill with deeper meanings of love the half empty words; never to make more divine the common service of life; never to put the best interpretation upon conduct; never to lift the leaden crown of care from the anxious brow; never to help to transfigure the mean and lowly with heavenly hopes and aspirations. Gone! What a world of vacancy and silence and subtle mystery! Is it strange we should wish well to those who were kind to the dead? And Naomi links her own being with them still. . . . . With true hearts they can never be disassociated."—*Statham.*

"Oh, ye beloved ones!
Though speechless, though unseen,
Love's bond is strong to-day,
As love has ever been.

"Deathless the memories,
And though unspoken now;
Dear names and tender words,
Binding as lover's vow.

. . . . . .

"Tender and true ye were,
All passionless ye lie
Beneath the churchyard grass,
The weird wind wanders by.

. . . . . .

"We speak, the murmuring wind
Wanders earth-born above;
They rest below;—that calm,
Speaks God's best gift of love."—*B.*

"In the wonderful providence of God which made Ruth find a friend in Boaz, the rich relative of her husband, she feels herself justified to find an indication that God is once more gracious to her, and has not left off his kindness. If now it was through the fault of her dear departed ones that she had hitherto experienced distress, then it also follows that, since God's goodness again manifests itself so conspicuously, his anger against those must likewise be come to an end. For that reason she speaks of his kindness, not only to the

living but also of the dead. For these had died through the same sin which had brought suffering on herself. Hence, God's help to her in her suffering is a manifestation of His unwearied grace toward both the living and the dead."—*Lange.*

"If we would enter into the force of this outburst of praise, we must remember that Naomi had lost her faith—not in God, indeed, but in the goodwill of God for her. . . . Now she descries a proof that God had not wholly abandoned her. No one who has witnessed such a revulsion from spiritual despair to renewed hope in the Divine goodness and compassion will marvel at the ecstasy which breathes in Naomi's words."—*Cox.*

VERSES 20, 21.

Theme.—KINSHIP THE GROUND OF REDEMPTION.

"O God, O kinsman loved, but not enough!
O man, with eyes majestic after death,
Whose feet have toiled along our pathways rough,
Whose lips drawn human breath!
By that one likeness which is ours and thine,
By that one nature which doth hold us kin;
By that high heaven where sinless Thou dost shine,
To draw us sinners in.
* * * * *
Come, lest this heart," etc.—*Jean Ingelow.*

And Naomi said, the man is near of kin etc. . . . And Ruth said, He said unto me also, etc. . . . And Naomi said, it is good, my daughter, etc.

In this exquisite dialogue Ruth goes on, we can imagine, to relate and unfold at greater length than is here written the goodness of Boaz. She is evidently pleased to speak well of him and his. Then comes out in reply what has all along possibly been in the mind of Naomi. She had been no boaster of her rich friend and kinsman, as many, and that only to be disappointed at last. But the right moment for speech has arrived. It is not merely "by chance" that this Good Samaritan has come along. She sees that Providence has been playing its part in the unfolding of events, and the loneliness and bitterness of spirit which found expression in her cry, "Call me not Naomi, call me Mara," is already a thing of the past. It is no casual helper who has come forward to relieve their necessities, but *one of the goelim.* "The man is near of kin unto us, one of our next kinsmen."

Notice **I. That this nearness of kinship gives the right to redeem.** (*a*) *A principle underlying the whole Jewish economy* to be seen alike in the patriarchial and Mosaic systems. Everything centred from the family centre. Kinship the very cement of their society.

The law has, however, a wider application, (*b*) *kinship is a natural and so a Divinely ordained institution.* The principle as true to-day as when laid hold of by Naomi. When kindred show themselves kind they only follow and satisfy the law of nature. The apostle says, "If any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith and is worse than an infidel" (1 Tim. v. 8). So that men even standing aside from the claims of God, allow and respond to these claims.

Again (*c*). The law touches a deeper realm still, that of spiritual and eternal things. Christ Himself must conform to it when He came to redeem. (1) *There was a necessity for this,* a needs be. In all things "*it behoved Him* to be made like unto His brethren," says the apostle (Heb. ii. 16, 17). (2) *There was a reason for it.* Forasmuch as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He Himself took part of the same, that through death He might destroy, &c., and deliver them who through fear of death, &c. Note. *Christ is the kinsman—Redeemer of all men.* [cf also on iii, 2, 4; iv, 9.]

II. This nearness of kinship points out and emphasises the direction in which to look for help. Naomi saw their safety secured by this intervention, their wants provided for, therefore she says in effect, "Cling to the deliverer thus providentially pointed out." So God often, and still opens up the path of safety and plenty in life (1) suddenly, (2) unexpectedly, (3), unmistakably.

"*It is good,*" she says, immediately and prospectively. Usual both in the Old and New Testament to put the positive for the comparative in this kind. [Mary hath chosen the good part, *i.e.* the better part, Luke x. 42. It is profitable for thee; *i.e.* more profitable, Matt. v. 29.] (*Fuller*). Note. God not only gives us providential directions, there are *special moments when He opens our eyes to see them as such.* Such a moment comes when the scales fall from our eyes and we see Jesus as our kinsman and our all (cf. Luke xxiv. 31; John xi. 40; 2 Kings vii. 7). It came to doubting Thomas, and he cried, "My Lord and my God."

Again, mark that just as natural affection, and the Levirate law alike, bound Boaz to render this help: they laid the obligation upon both Naomi and Ruth look to him for it. He had opened the way to aright relationship between them, and now there can be no excuse on their side. Note (1) *How exactly this illustrates Christ's position towards us.* He has taken the first step—given invitations which are unmistakable; now it is ours—under charge of the blackest ingratitude if we refuse—to respond. (2) *It is a discourtesy where we are beholden to alter our dependency (Bishop Hall).* Generosity dislikes to have its gifts slighted or its sincerity doubted (*Thomson*). Ruth evidently felt that because the kindness of Boaz was so great her obedience and dependence should be complete, while Naomi encouraged her thus to regard his orders as obligatory.

IMPROVEMENT. (1) Follow Providential guidances as they unfold in life. (2) Fall in with the natural and Divinely-appointed way of redemption. (3) May we not say that these words express the duty of the spiritual Ruth to labour in Christ's fields and believe steadfastly in Him, and not to stray from His presence into other fields even till the end of the world (*Wordsworth*).

"So suggestive is this figure, which was not a mere random selection, but an institution designed to foreshadow a great truth, that it is constantly referred to in the Word of God. We all recollect the touching case of Job. In the depth of his affliction, when all seemed desperate, he said, 'I know that my Redeemer liveth' [Heb., 'My Goel liveth']."—*Dr. Cumming.*

"Christ came into our home, breathed our air, clad Himself in our dress, wept our tears, and was penetrated and pierced with more than all the accumulated sorrows that humanity is heir to, that we thus—there being no other process in the world besides—might be rescued from our sins, and might hear, ringing in the depths of our hearts, with the opening of the prison doors to the captive, 'There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus,'"—*Dr. Cumming.*

"I have seen the twine-thread of a cordial friend hold, when the cable-rope of a rich kinsman hath broken. Let those therefore be thankful to God, to whom God hath given means to be maintained of themselves, without dependance on their kindred. Better it is to be the weakest of substances to subsist of themselves, than to be the bravest accidents to be maintained by another."—*Fuller.*

"Our blessed Saviour is our Goel; it is He that hath a right to redeem. If we expect to receive benefit by him, let us closely adhere to Him, and His fields, and His family; let us not go to the world and its fields for that which is to be had with Him only, and which He has encouraged us to expect from Him. Has the Lord dealt bountifully with us? Let us not be found in any other field, nor seek for happiness and satisfaction in the creature. Tradesmen take it ill if those that are in their books go to another shop. We lose Divine favours if we slight them."—*Matt. Henry.*

"Even the lump of clay, when it was placed near the rose, according to the beautiful Persian proverb, caught some of its fragrance. It is the direction of Him in Whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, 'Go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock, and feed thy kids beside the shepherd's tents.'"—*A. Thomson, D.D.*

VERSE 23.

Theme.—CONSTANCY AT HOME AND ABROAD.

"Man to thy labour bow,
Thrust in the sickle now,
Reap where thou once did plough—
God sends thee bread."—*Montgomery.*

"Home to calmer bliss invites,
More tranquil and more true."—*Bowring.*

***So she kept fast by** the maidens of Boaz to glean unto the end, etc. **And dwelt with** her mother-in-law.*

The homely history repeats and re-repeats this idea of keeping fast by, etc. The wandering sheep never thrives (*Thomson*). Wisdom to prevent danger by not exposing ourselves to peril (*Bernard*). Naomi has wisely and affectionately warned her against the danger of going elsewhere (v. 22). Boaz, too, has spoken to the same end (v. 8, 21). Here we see the good counsel (*a*) thankfully accepted, (*b*) carefully followed [cf. Prov. xiii. 20].

Note. *Ruth an example to the young* in this—obedient, scrupulously attentive in carrying out the advice which has been given. Even Ishmael obeyed his mother in matters of moment (Gen. xxi. 21), and Herodias first consulted her mother before she asked a boon of her father Herod (Matt. xiv, 7, 8,). In this respect they condemn many undutiful children of our days (*Fuller*).

Labour and rest go a long way to make up life. Here is constancy in both.

Notice I. The commendable constancy and continuity in connexion with labour enforced here. Harvest prospects naturally (1) reconcile to exertion, (2) animate to diligence, (3) stimulate to constant and continual toil. Whether as gleaners or reapers we should respond to the appeal. Ruth evidently laboured as one who felt that the present gracious season of ingathering would not last for long. Blayed the ant and not the grasshopper (*Bernard*). A few days or weeks, and it would be all over—its opportunities gone for ever. Reasonable, therefore, that every other concern should give place to this, and that every exertion should be made to improve the short, but all-important, period.

How true the principle in other directions! (*a*) *So with life itself*—fleeting—once ours, then gone for ever. (*b*) *So with gospel opportunities.* The season for repentance and the ingathering of faith (1) limited, (2) short, (3) uncertain in duration. Hence the wisdom of improving the present opportunity. To-day if ye will hear His voice, etc. (Heb. iv. 7). He that gathereth in summer is a wise son; but he that sleepeth in harvest is a son that causeth shame (Prov. x. 5). Note. *The best thrift is to use the present opportunity.*

Again, Ruth laboured until the end of the barley and wheat harvest—a double chance, and no part of it neglected. There are who at first have a ravenous appetite to work, but quickly surfeit thereof (*Fuller*). So in spiritual things many who begin well, as Orpah did, (I. 14) (cf. Gal. iii. 3; iv. 9; Matt. xiii. 5, 6, etc.) Note. (*a*) *The constant pace goes furthest and is freest from being tired* (*Fuller*). (*b*) *He that endures unto the end is to be saved* (Matt. xxiv 13). (*c*) *Opportunities neglected are not likely to return again.* How solemn the responsibility, then, of this present! lest we should be found saying, "The harvest is past," etc. (Jer. viii. 20).

Notice II. The commendable constancy and continuity in connection with home and rest enforced here. And she dwelt with her mother-in-law (1) *Shows her discretion.* She constantly came home to her mother at night as became a virtuous woman that was for working days, and not for merry nights (*Matt. Henry*); (2) *Shows her affection for Naomi.* No favour abroad, or gain reaped there, made her neglect the friend with whom she had come from Moab. Clinging fast to her new acquaintances in the harvest-field did not interfere with

"cleaving to Naomi" at home. A lesson and an example to the inconstant here. Why gaddest thou about so much to change thy ways [cf. on I. i. p. 11]? (3) *Shews her love for home.* Had what so many men in these days want, a centre for her duties and affections, and was true to that—fixed—not given to change. Christ's command to his disciples "go not from house to house;" enforces this in connection with the interests and spread of his kingdom (Matt. x. 16). Note. (*a*) *Children are to cling to home so long as they may be of use there.* How can they show their gratitude for the past better than as Ruth did by affection and care in the present? (*b*) *Change apart from God's guidance is always a foolish thing.*

IMPROVEMENT.—An interesting *illustration* of youthful fidelity in the Saviour's work (Tyng). Such fidelity makes its distinct and decided choice. The aim single, the pursuit absorbing. "This one thing I do," said Paul. *Suggest* (1) that every one should have his chosen field in which to gather instruction; (2) And that having chosen it he ought to keep to it (*Thomson*). Wandering may very possibly lead on to dangerous ground. (3) The necessity there is for the "home life"—(*a*) guard it, (*b*) cherish it. Go forth to work, come home to live (*Baldwin Brown*). Note. *Home and heaven are kindred spheres* (*Ibid.*).

"Maids are the fittest company for maids; amongst whom a chaste widow, such as Ruth was, may well be recounted. Modesty is the life-guard of chastity."—*Fuller*

"Dinah went out to see the daughters of the land, and we know what a disgrace her vanity ended in. Ruth kept at home, and helped to maintain her mother, and went out on no other errand than to get provision for her, and we shall find afterwards what preferment her humility and industry ended in. Seest thou a man diligent in his business? Honour is before him."—*Matt. Henry.*

"Perhaps some will say, that Christ willeth us not to take care. But doth He ever will any man not to labour? The care which Christ speaketh of, is immoderate care, care without faith, or care full of doubting, and little faith, and that which is without care of religion, the mind being taken up wholly with the world; else men may, yea, and ought to labour for the things of this life to be provident for the time to come, and frugal in expenses for the time present."—*Bernard.*

"It was Christ's counsel to His disciples, (Matt. x. ii.) to "abide" in the place wherein they did enter, and not to go from house to house. Such the settledness of Ruth,—where she first fastened, there she fixed; she "dwelt with her mother." Naomi affords Ruth house room, Ruth gains Naomi food; Naomi provides a mansion, Ruth prays for meat; and so [they] mutually serve to supply the wants of each other. If envy, and covetousness, and idleness were not the hindrances, how might one Christian reciprocally be a help unto another! All have something, none have all things; yet all might have all things in comfortable and competent proportion, if seriously suiting themselves as Ruth and Naomi did, that what is defective in one might be supplied in the other."—*Fuller.*

"This Ruth the Moabitess, a heathen by birth, may rise up in judgment against such as should be natural children, who having gotten from under their parents, when they can live of themselves, they make no reckoning of them being altogether unwilling to live with them, and most of all to relieve them."—*Bernard.*

The Saviour's field is perfectly distinct.... We can never doubt what positive and true religion is in the human character, or what it requires of us; our questions are never on the side of things which are certainly right, but on the side of those which are possibly wrong. In such cases there can be no question that it is right to abstain from that which is not perfectly free from doubt in its indulgence. Happy is it for the young christian to take a decided, positive standard of conduct; and in all things to seek and to pursue that which is manifestly good to the use of edifying, and adapted to minister to a growth in grace, and a real likeness to a holy Master. Such will avoid the scenes and instruments of temptation. "It is good that they meet thee not in any other field."—*Tyng.*

"She stood breast high amid the corn,
Clasped by the golden light of morn,
Like the sweetheart of the sun,
Who many a glowing kiss had won
"On her cheeks an autumn flush
Deeply ripened—such a blush
In the midst of brown was born,
Like red poppies grown with corn.
"Round dark eyes her tresses fell,
Which were blackest none could tell,
But long lashes veiled a light
That had else been all too bright.
"And her hat with shady brim,
Made her tressy forehead dim;
Thus she stood amid the stocks,
Praising God with sweetest looks.
"Sure," I said, 'Heaven did not mean
Where I reap thou should'st but glean
Lay thy sheaf adown and come,
Share my harvest and my home.'"

Thomas Hood.

CHAPTER III.

THE CLAIMANT IN THE THRESHING FLOOR.

CONTENTS.—*Ruth, at the instigation of Naomi, by laying herself down at the feet of Boaz, claims an acknowledgment of the relationship between them. He explains to her that there is a nearer kinsman than himself, but promises to undertake the duties of a goel [redeemer] should the prior claim not be insisted upon. He dismisses her with a present, and she returns to Naomi to await the issue.*

VERSES 1—6.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.—**Then** [and] **Naomi . . . said.** The plan had matured itself slowly in her mind during the harvest season, now comes the proposal. Boaz, by his kindness and attention to Ruth, has evidently removed whatever difficulties she has felt heretofore [cf. on i. 11-13: p. 47]. **Shall I not seek?** I must seek rest for thee. הֲלֹא as usual an expression of general admission or of undoubted certainty, in the sense of "Is it not true I seek for thee?" It is my duty to seek for thee (*Keil*). The obligation to enforce the claims of a Levirate marriage lay on the side of Naomi and Ruth. In accordance with ancient usage to leave the assertion of a right with its possessor (*Lange*), the widow could demand her rights of the nearest relative, and if refused, put him openly to shame (*Ibid*). **Rest** [a resting place, Num. x. 33] **for thee.** A secure life, under the guardian care of a husband (*Rossenmuller*) Cf. on i. 9 as to this "rest in the house of a husband;" with the respect and protection it implied. That which made the fate of the daughter of Jephthah so sad was, that she never found a resting place in the house of a husband (*Lange*). **That it may be well with thee.** Which shall be good for thee (*Carpzov Rosen.*) That marriage may be to thee a merry-age (*Trapp*). She assumed that every true rest was good (*Morison.*)

Ver. 2. **And now is not Boaz of our kindred?** Our relation (*Keil*). Our acquaintance, *i.e.*, relative (*Lange*). Hence the justness of the claim. **Is he not** therefore thy husband according to the law (*Wordsworth*). Cannot reasonably suppose that a pious woman would counsel against the law of God or the moral sense of good men, such as Boaz. To do so, would have alienated and repelled him, and so have frustrated her own purpose (*Ibid*). **With whose maidens thou wast.** A delicate reminder that Boaz has himself placed her on a level with his own Israelitish people [cf. on v. 13, 14]. **Behold he winnoweth barley to-night.** Naomi must have come into closer connection with her relative. She is minutely informed of what he does, and where he is (*Lange*). The claim which Ruth had to make, could hardly be urged by her publicly in the harvest field, in the light of day (*Wordsworth*). **He winnoweth barley.** Literally, he is winnowing the threshing-floor of barley. He is winnowing the barley floor (barley on the threshing-floor) (*Keil*). Performed by tossing up the grain against the wind with a fork (Jer. iv. 11, 12). Shows the simple manners of the times. This "mighty man of wealth" assisted personally (*Speakers's Com.*). It is not unusual for the husband, wife, and all the family, to encamp at the *baiders*, or threshing-floors, until the harvest is over (*Dr. Thomson*). **o night.** Chosen for the advantage of the breeze which blew then (Gen. iii. 8). **In the night wind** (*Targum*). Much agricultural labour of various kinds performed on bright nights (*Kitto*). **In the threshing-floor.** Nothing more than a level place in the field, under the open heavens (*Keil*). Constructed of a circular form, perhaps 50 feet in diameter, merely by beating down the earth hard (*Robinson*) [cf. Thomson ii. 314]. Both the threshing and winnowing are done in the open air, rain in harvest time being almost unknown (*Wordsworth*) [cf. Judges vi. 37; 2 Sam. vi. 6.]

Ver. 3. **Wash thyself therefore and anoint thee.** Not done in order to win Boaz by external beauty; for she is especially cautioned against allowing him to see her by day (*Lange*). Yet she is to go as a bride adorned for her husband, appropriately and symbolically dressed. **And put thy** [best] **raiment upon thee.** And ornament thyself with thy garments (*Syr. Arab*). Use all lawful means to ingratiate (*Trapp*). **And get thee down to the floor.** Bethlehem situated on a hill (*Stanley*), c.f. on ii. 4; p. 101. Serve God's providence by demanding marriage of him, which in those days, and in Ruth's case, was neither unlawful nor immodest (*Trapp*). *Consilium hoc est re legitimum specie inhonestum* (*Junius*). Nothing in these directions which was considered improper under the special and peculiar circumstances of the case (*Kitto*). This was a bold expedient, but it must be remembered that it was undertaken at the instigation of an aged and pious woman, and simply to remind Boaz of the relative positions in which they stood to each other. **Make not thyself known unto.** Suffer not thyself to be perceived by (*Lange*). The grain heaps probably surrounded the threshing floor, and would offer a chance for concealment, even though the place itself was under the open heavens. **Until he shall have done eating and drinking.** Until the moment of leisure and ease. Men more disposed to listen attentively then.

Ver. 4. **Thou shalt mark.** For the sake of finding it in the darkness coming on. **And uncover his feet.** Rather the place of his feet, the foot of his bed, as we should say (*Sp. Com.*). Sleep at his feet (*Syr. Arab.*). Boaz probably slept under a rug, sheep skin, or thick quilt, and was covered with another, or by his cloak (*Kitto*). In Palestine men lay down with their clothes on, but are careful to cover their feet with a long mantle now called the Chudda, a wrapper of coarse cloth (*Postans*). **All that thou sayest.** Her consent that of faith and obedience, the conduct of one conscious of her own purity of purpose, and willing to encounter suspicion in the exercise of duty (*Wordsworth*). **Unto me.** Omit (*Cassel, Bertheau, Bellamy, &c.*) **I will do.** Evident that inclination, judgment, and all that she had seen of Boaz came in to enforce Namoi's advice. His age and his character probably shrinking and diffident, yet pious and honourable, encouraged her in obedience.

Ver. 6. **And she went down unto the floor.** Probably while it was yet light.

VERSE 1.

Theme.—ONE SEEKING REST FOR ANOTHER.

"As if with marriage came the end,
The entrance into settled rest,
The calm to which love's tossings tend,
The quiet rest."—*Jean Ingelow.*

"Whatever hypocrites austerely talk
Of purity, and place, and innocence,
Defaming as impure what God declares
Pure, and commands to some, leaves free to all,
Our Maker bids increase."—*Milton.*

Shall I not seek rest for thee, that it may be well with thee?

All Scripture given by inspiration of God and *profitable* (2. Tim. iii. 10). That is when rightly understood and intrepreted. Some passages however peculiarly liable to misunderstanding (*Thomson*). Divine ways often strange at first sight, and seemingly unsatisfactory to first judgments. We have to look at them as a whole before we can see them aright. So with the Divine Word. Parts which a false delicacy would expunge and which would never have appeared had the Bible been a merely human book. To understand them aright you must look (*a*) at their scope, (*b*) at the motive (*c*) at the underlying principle. Theend aimed at right, the spirit which prompts the aim right, rest assured that the means employed will fall under the same great law. This true (1) of the Divine doings however mysterious, (2) of the doings of all who are truly led of Him.

See how this is illustrated here. **I. Naomi's motive is right.** (1) *Justice to the dead.* The law of Israel was that no branch of the family tree should be allowed to become extinct. The dead Mahlon had claims upon Boaz, and only the fact that Ruth was of Moab, had prevented these claims being enforced earlier. At first the claim seemed a hopeless one (I. 11-13). Now thanks to the kindness of Boaz, Naomi sees light beginning to break in upon their gloomy prospects. (2) *Justice to the living.* Not merely kindness to Ruth and not merely gratitude, although these motives must have moved Naomi powerfully, but a deeper feeling —that instinctive sense of right, which overleaps such petty boundaries as nationalities. Her feelings as an Israelite, exclusive, conservative, unyielding may find expression I. 9-14; now comes out the deeper feelings of a woman and a mother. Hence her wisdom projected for her daughter, that which her daughter's modesty forbade her to project for herself.

Anxiety, solicitude for the settlement of a daughter pardonable, even commendable, so that modesty be not overstepped. Naomi of the same opinion as Paul as to the true sphere of woman: "I desire therefore that the younger widows marry," &c. (1 Tim. v. 14). Too old to marry herself, she by no means placed the same restriction upon those younger than herself. Such prudery is often only disguised selfishness and callousness of heart. Note *Age must not make itself a standard for youth.* Naomi's care without doubt commendable and recorded for imitation (*M. Henry*). Analagous to the conduct of a gospel church. Jerusalem always tender towards her daughters (*Macgowan*).

II. Naomi's principle is right. That one may seek rest for another—that one

may, and ought to forward the well-being of others the essential principle of the gospel itself (Luke xix. 10). So Christ sought not his own (John v. 30; viii. 28; viii. 50). So charity seeketh not her own" (1 Cor. xiii. 5). So Paul "not seeking mine own profit," he says, "but the profit of many" (1 Cor. x. 33). Note. *Bearing one another's burdens we "fulfil" the law of Christ* (Gal. vi. 2; 1 Cor. x. 24; Phil. ii. 20, 21).

Again, could Naomi do otherwise for one so near and dear as Ruth. She fulfils *not only a religious but a natural duty.* The young have claims upon the aged, upon their experience, foresight, judgment, &c. As wrong to withhold these, as to withhold more natural and apparent benefits. Eli doubtless gave his children bread, but seems to have withheld instruction, direction, reproof, restraint, and so came under the anger of God (James iii. 12, 13). Note. *Few greater responsibilities in life than this of providing for the future well-being of children.* "Shall I not seek rest for thee, that it may be well with thee"—the burden of many a parent's heart and prayers.

Once more mark the kind of "rest" Naomi sought for Ruth—home rest, household well-being, that which is the purest of earth's pleasures and the foretaste of heaven's joys. Note. *The inspired idea of marriage is, that it is and ought to be "a rest."* "Not good for man to be alone" (Gen. ii. 18), much less woman, naturally weaker and more defenceless than man: still less a stranger like Ruth. [cf. on i. 9; p. 36.] With regard to woman marriage was viewed as the natural fulfilment of her calling, without which her life was helpless and defenceless as that of a people without a God (*Lange*).

The principle true to-day. Where love, patience, unselfishness, &c. are found; married life as much like "rest" as can be discovered in this world (*Braden*). Of course, cares, anxieties, difficulties are to be expected. As it is said of Egypt no country hath more venomous creatures, none more antidotes; so marriage hath many troubles, but withal many keeps against trouble (*Trapp*). Note. *Those are giddy indeed that marriage does not compose* (*M. Henry*).

Naomi's plan is right—judged by the time and circumstances. Involved no impropriety (*Binney*). The face, the worst piece of it, the heart was sound (*Bishop Hall.*) Certainly it was a bold expedient but not necessarily the worse because of that. She knew the piety and chastity of Boaz and Ruth (*Trapp*). The customs of the age and country were simpler, freer, but not less pure than the more formal customs of our own land and age (*Braden*).

Dr. Thomson and others however only vindicate the intentions, while they censure the measures, acquit of designing evil, but blame Naomi for not "abstaining from all *appearance* of evil." Too much cunning and stratagem, and forcing of Providence about the whole transaction (*Thomson*). Ran the hazard of sacrificing a good name in the use of a too bold and perilous artifice (*Ibid*). Note. *Every action that is reported is not straightway* allowed (*Bishop Hall*). If every act of a holy person should be our rule, we should have crooked lives (*Ibid*).

IMPROVEMENT.—(1) *Rest a natural desire* of all men. David would flee away into the wilderness, leave the city and camp far behind, and be at rest (Ps. lv. 6). Take the broad sense of the word and this is what all men are seeking. *Recognised by Christ as a necessity.* "Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place and rest awhile (Mark vi. 31). *This desire satisfied in Christ* (Matt. xi. 28, 29; Heb. iv. 3. We which have believed, &c). Note. *Rest is a thing to be sought.*

(2) *Thoughtful love a common thing* in human history. We cannot always be with those who are dear to us—we may provide for their welfare, however, in that future when we are with them no longer. Bernard on this:—

Shall I not seek. It is the parents' duty to provide matches for their children. So did God, the general Father, for His son Adam, Abraham for Isaac, Isaac for Jacob. Samson entreated his father and mother to get him a wife (Judges xiv. 1, 2).

Rest for thee. So she called the married estate. The word is "a place of rest" to settle in. Note. *The married estate is an estate of rest.*

That it may be well with thee. Marriage is for the well-being of such as enter

into the holy estate. Doth not God say, "It is not good for man to be alone"? It is the estate in which the holiest have lived, and in which Christ Himself would be born. St. Paul indeed commended single life, but not simply but with respect unto the then present times, full of troubles and persecutions.

While the women are in distress it is Ruth who takes the initiative [ch. ii. 2.]; now, when hope grows large, it is Naomi. When hardship was to be endured, the mother submitted her will to the daughter—for Ruth was not sent to glean, she went of her own accord; now, when the endeavour is to secure the joy and happiness held out in prospect, the daughter yields in all things to the direction of the mother. The thought of labour for the mother originates with the daughter; but it is the mother who forms plans of happiness for the daughter.—*Lange.*

Luck is ever waiting for something to turn up. Labour, with keen eyes and strong will, will turn up something. Luck lies in bed, and wishes the postman would bring him the news of a legacy. Labour turns out at six o'clock, and, with busy pen or ringing hammer, lays the foundation of a competence. Luck whines. Labour whistles. Luck relies on chance. Labour on character.—*Cobden.*

This word "menuchah" is used in many weighty senteuces in the Old Testament Scriptures. It is used to designate the asylum of honour and freedom which a Hebrew found in the home of her husband, her secure refuge from servitude, insolence, and neglect. It is also used to denote the asylum of freedom and repose on which the Hebrew race entered when it gained full possession of the promised land, when in the days of Solomon, every man might sit under his vine or his fig tree, none daring to make him afraid. It was used by the Prophets in a still higher sense; with them God was the true menuchah or rest of His people, nay, of the whole world; to them it was revealed that only when the Immanuel came, the God-with-us, would the golden days of Paradise return; and the world enter into its final and glorious rest. So that those who first listened to our Saviour's gracious invitation (Matt. xi. 28-30), those on whose weary and fevered spirits His promise of "rest" first fell, would understand that He was offering them an asylum of repose, honour, and freedom, such as the Hebrew wife found in her husband's house, such as the Hebrew race found in the sacred land when it was wholly their own, such as the Hebrew Prophets had found in God in the moments of their loftiest aspirations.—*Cox.*

This is Naomi's conception of wedded life. Very beautiful, but how many realise it in their experience? Have we not heard multitudes of people declare that marriage was the real beginning of their troubles? Then anxiety about providing and regulating a household has commenced; then business and domestic cares have taken away all expected pleasure; then tempers are tried as never before; then disputes and bickerings arise that destroy all peace; then the beautiful illusions of youth have given place to the hard and stern practicalities of maturing life.—*Braden.*

The estate of holy matrimony is well called a state of rest, for the natural affections and propensities instinctively yearn for it, and in it alone find their lawful gratification. The Rabbin's say: "The man is restless while he misses the rib that was taken out of his side; and the woman is restless till she gets under the man's arm, from whence she was taken."—*Steele and Terry.*

"I, as a Protestant have been accustomed to assert the purity and dignity of the offices of husband, wife, and parent. Have I ever examined the grounds of my own assertion? Do I believe them to be as callings from God, spiritual, sacramental, divine, eternal? Or am I at heart regarding and using them, like the Papist, merely as heaven's indulgences to the infirmities of fallen man?" . . . . Those miserable dilettanti, who in books and sermons are whimpering meagre secondhand praise of celibacy, depreciating as carnal and degrading those family ties to which they owe their own existences, and in the enjoyment of which they themselves all the while unblushingly indulge—insulting thus their own wives and mothers—nibbling ignorantly at the very root of that household purity which constitutes the distinctive superiority of Protestant over Popish nations."—*Kingsley.*

Christianity, be it remembered, proposes not to extinguish our natural desires, but to bring them under just control and direct them to their true objects.—*Wilberforce.*

VERSES 2—4.

Theme.—AN IMPORTANT REMINDER.

"The grey old man was honoured there,
The matron's words were cherished,
And honesty in youthful hearts
By age's word was nourished."—*Nichol.*

(2) *Is not Boaz of our kindred, with whose maidens thou wast?* Naomi has laid hold of the fact that they are entitled to use a certain amount of freedom in the affair—(1) because of kinship; (2) because of the kindness Boaz has already shown to Ruth. The allowing Ruth to glean under especially favourable circumstance [see on ii. 8, 13—16] not without a meaning. Note. *We more readily ask*

favours from those who have already shown us kindness. In the nature of such to grow and become the foundation of our future actions.

I. An encouraging reminder. We need to put each other in mind, as well as recall to our own memories the thought of our claims and privileges. Naturally (1) apt to forget; (2) apt to delay action even when remembering; (3) apt to remember and yet not realize. "I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things," says the Apostle Peter, "*though ye know them.*" This a favourite idea of the Apostle's in his old age [cf. 2 Peter i. 12, 13, 15; iii. 1, &c.]. So Paul writing to Timothy [1 Tim. iv. 6; 2 Tim. i. 3, 6; ii. 14].

II. An implied argument, viz., that he is bound in conscience to take care of our affairs (M. Henry). *Is he not our kinsman?* How much a kindred question implies to the believer in Christ's proper humanity. (1) Can we fear to approach? (2) Can we do other than expect a welcome? [On the Kinsman Redeemer, see iv. 9, 10; ii, 20, 21].

III. A duty beginning to unfold itself. Why not bring the claim to the notice of Boaz? The obligation lay upon them to take initiative [see Crit. and Exeg. Notes]. Time and place, both opportune now that the harvest is ending. Note. *A well-chosen season is one of the best advantages of any action* (*Trapp*).

So in spiritual things we must seek, knock, ask, &c. In one sense Christ woos, in another He waits to be wooed. No presumption in seeking his feet.

> "From labour health, from health contentment springs,
> Contentment opes the source of every joy."—*Beattie.*

Verse 2. *Behold he winnoweth, &c.*

Not ashamed to do this himself—lived in the days of ancient simplicity (*Lawson*). *Not too idle* to deny himself of sleep that it might be done properly —a model farmer [cf. on ii. 2, 4, p. 93, 100].

See here, **I. Work associated with the character and position of a gentleman.** Boaz was this, yet he labours with his own hands. Modern refinements and etiquette give no more pleasure to the fashionable gentleman than honest industry gave to this grandson of a famous prince (*Lawson*). Camillus, Fabricius, and other famous Roman consuls held the plough. Edmund Burke, in the very height of his fame, farmed his own lands near Beaconsfield. Note. (*a*) *Labour the law of God* (Gen. ii. 15; iii. 19). All are to work, some with hand, some with brain. (*b*) *A false pride that dislikes handwork* (*Radford Thomson*).

II. Work associated with the character and position of a man of God. The claims of the higher life do not exempt us from the calls and cares of the lower. Christ Himself doubtless laboured in the carpenter's shop at Nazareth. And it was while doing so that it was written of Him that He "increased in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and man."

Verse 3. *Wash thyself therefore, and anoint thee.* Ruth must seek to make herself attractive; even though the coming interview is to be in the dark—a duty always. Preparation necessary even for a duty like this. Note. *Cleanliness enforced in the Scriptures as well as godliness;* comes down to the lowest duties of life. Much that inspiration takes notice of, which men count mean and unworthy of attention. These trifling details, however correct from an artistic point of view, heighten the effect of the whole picture, suggest the truthfulness of the narrative, &c.

IMPROVEMENT.—(1) The Bride of Christ is pleasing to her Bridegroom only when anointed with the Spirit and clothed in the garments of salvation (*Starke*). (2) We may use all lawful means to ingratiate, &c., if our purpose be right. If decency of apparel is not a virtue, slovenliness is at least an approach to vice (*Lawson*).

Bernard on this (condensed) :—

A true friend is not in show only, or in well wishes, but in devising how to bring to pass what they desire. So Jonathan with David (1 Sam. xix. 2, 3; xx.

12, 13), Abraham with Lot (Gen. xiv.) Note. Godly parents seek to match their children where God alloweth. Naomi's ground was the law of God, as she thought.

Behold he winnoweth barley to-night. See and consider the providence of God! It is as one would wish, it falleth out opportunely. Warrant from God, experience of the love of man, and fit occasion to effect a matter, are strong inducements to attempt the same. So Esther going in unto Ahasuerus (Esth. v. 1—8). Note. It is no unseemliness for men of birth, of place, of wealth, sometime to follow in their own person mean labours of their calling.

Verse 3. *Wash thyself, therefore.* Outward cleanliness is praiseworthy. Our Christian profession is pure and holy, which outward cleanliness well befitteth. And seeing it is of good report, we are to observe it. *And anoint thee.* Christians may lawfully use God's creatures for outward comeliness, and to preserve that seemliness which is God's own work in us (Psalm cxiv. 15). *And put thy raiment upon thee.* Touching this necessity of wearing apparel, nature teacheth it, and need enforceth it.

Get thee down to the floor. The widow woman allowed by the law of Moses to claim marriage of the next kinsman. No more immodest for women to claim that right then, than now for one betrothed to challenge the man for her husband. Where God alloweth the thing it taketh away the scandal and the offence. *But make not thyself known to the man until he shall have done eating and drinking.* Men are more apt to speak freely then and to promise their goodwill than at other times. Note. Her mind must be showed in private, and to him alone. The night and in private make modest persons utter more freely their thoughts than otherwise they would in the light and before company.

When he lieth down. Rest follows after labour, and the night is appointed for the same. So the Psalmist teaches (civ. 13), and Jacob practised (Gen. xviii. 2). This the right use of time.

Thou shalt mark the place. Careful observation prevents error. Shows also that in those times they had no set place to lie down.

Uncover his feet. Aims at making Ruth his yokefellow, yet teaches her to proceed in humility, to go to his feet. Note. *Humility not any hindrance, but the way to advancement.*

"Let us look into providences; surely they mean somewhat. They hang so together; have been so constant, so clear, so unclouded."—*Cromwell.*

"Perhaps the assurance, which long trial has given her of the good government and firm chastity of her daughter-in-law, together with her persuasion of the religious gravity of Boaz, made her think that design safe, which to others had been perilous, if not desperate. But besides that, holding Boaz next of blood to Elimelech, she made account of him as the lawful husband of Ruth; so as there wanted nothing but a challenge of a consummation, nothing was abated but some outward solemnities, which though expedient for the satisfaction of others, yet were not essential to marriage; and if there were not these colours for a project so suspicious, it would not follow that the action were warrantable because Naomi's. Why should her example be more safe in this than in matching her sons with infidels, than in sending back Orpah to her father's gods."—*Bishop Hall.*

"Labour is the law of man's life, in contrast to the creatures. Because man became a sinner and God cursed him with it, says a large school of theologians. Because man was a child of God, and the Father worketh hitherto, and the Son also worketh, say others, and, I think, wiser and more far-sighted men. These daily tasks are the dignity and glory of our nature, as sons under discipline."—*Baldwin Brown.*

"Naomi's solicitude for her devoted daughter-in-law is beautiful and motherly. But the form into which it ran and took shape can never recur in the midst of the culture and customs of European society. Even the method of winnowing the golden grains of the harvest field is antique and obsolete. So, too, is the method which Boaz adopted to watch over his cereal treasures. He constituted himself his own watchman and policeman."—*Pulpit Com.*

"Ruth was directed to pay special attention to the adornments of her person, to which, to this extent at least, she had been a stranger since the death of her husband. She is to lay aside the weeds of mourning and the garments of toil, and, after bathing and anointing, don the festive garb, for the expedition on which she goes is of a joyous, bridal nature. All this, however, is not done in order to win Boaz by external beauty, for she is specially cautioned against allowing him to see her by day. But why this caution? Boaz was a

believing Israelite, and therefore also a man of strict morals. It would have perplexed and displeased him to think that anybody else had seen Ruth, and might suspect both her and himself of an illicit meeting on the solitary threshing-floor. He would have scarcely listened to her, but removed her at once. The purpose for which she came had also an appropriate symbolism which any previous meeting would have disturbed."—*Lange.*

"The church must put on her best attire when she comes to Christ. She is brought to the King in raiments of needlework, in the Psalms (xiv. 14); she puts on her beautiful garments, in Isaiah (lii. 1); she is adorned as a bride for her husband in raiment pure and white, in the Apocalypse (Rev. xxi. 2)."—*Wordsworth.*

"She was to discover nothing of her intention to Boaz when she went to the feast, but rather to avoid any particular notice, that he might entertain no suspicion of what was to follow. Concealment of intentions may be very proper and very consistent with uprightness in some cases. But we must beware of doing anything that will not bear the light, or using those arts of concealment in transacting lawful affairs that may be attended with bad effects upon our character. It was perfectly consistent with uprightness in Samuel to conceal his chief intention when he came to Bethlehem to anoint David; and in Solomon, when he commanded a sword to be brought and his guards to slay the living child about which the two harlots contended."—*Lawson.*

"Seek him in private when no eye but that of heaven is upon thee; come secretly to his feet, and lay thy helpless, desolate state open before his seat of mercy; freely confess the baseness of thine original; he will not despise thee on account of the hole of the pit from whence thou wast digged."—*Macgowan.*

VERSES 5, 6.

Theme.—OBEDIENCE IN INNOCENCE.

"Age, by long experience well informed,

. . . . . .

As time improves the grapes authentic juice
Mellows and makes the speech more fit for use,
And claims a reverence in its shortening day,
That 'tis an honour and a joy to pay."

All that thou sayest unto me I will do. And she went, etc.

Ruth once more a model of filial obedience, and that when called upon to discharge a difficult and delicate mission, one which must have been trying to her modesty as a woman. She errs, if at all, by excess of complaisance. The errors of young people are commonly of an opposite kind (*Lawson*).

If anyone is to be blamed it must be Naomi. Her acquaintance with the laws and customs of Israel are her defence. Ruth, as a foreigner, was dependent upon her for instruction in these things. She obeys, although she might very naturally shrink from the task. Gratitude, respect for Naomi, as well as reason led her. Goes freely and without fear. Hesitates not, doubts not.

Three things exemplified and enforced here—

I. Humble trustfulness on the part of the young. (1) On the lowest ground *a duty.* (2) On higher ground to be cultivated as *a virtue.* (3) On highest, as its own reward, *a pleasure.* The sequel proves that this obedience of Ruth was not tempting Providence—rather it was acting upon faith. The trust that has brought her so far sustains her now. Goes with unshrinking confidence.

II. Deference to the opinions and judgment of the aged. An important lesson. Note. *These more likely to be correct than those of the young.* More experienced.

III. That cheerful compliance which adds grace to obedience. The way we obey is something as well as the act itself [cf. on i. 10, p. 44, *Macgowan*].

Note. (*a*) *Ruth not only promised but performed.* Contrasts with many who say, and do not; or who will not say, and yet do. More, (*b*) *she carries out her obedience to the slightest details of the project.* "All that thou sayest I will do." How important is this that obedience should be thorough [through out]. The

fortune of things of the greatest importance often hangs upon the doing or leaving undone a thing which seems very small (*Guicciardiani*).

"That the conduct of Ruth was in accordance with the law under which she lived cannot be doubted. See Deut. xxv. 5—10, where no option seems left to the woman. The demand was a duty which she owed to the memory of her dead husband, whose name she was to continue; to that husband's mother, who was more than a parent to her, and whom she might rescue from indigence and misery; to the nation whose tribes and law of inheritance were thus appointed to be preserved; and to God, whose mandates were thus obeyed, and who held out to her the propect that Messiah possibly might, as we find, he actually did, spring from this union."—*Macartney.*

"Abraham equivocated; David doubly sinned; Peter denied his Lord; Paul was not faultless; Aaron enticed to idolatry; Moses spoke unadvisedly with his lips; in fact every vessel in the sanctuary has been flawed; only one has been pure, perfect, spotless, unimpeachable; that we may all feel how true is that word, 'If we say that we have no sin we deceive ourselves,' and by the contrast how magnificent is that character which was holy, harmless, and undefiled, and separate from sinners. Suppose, then, Naomi's advice does not commend itself to you as proper even in these circumstances: let it be regarded as wrong; yet the record of what an individual does in the inspired page, is not, therefore, the justification of his conduct."—*Cumming.*

"Tempting God ordinarily is either by acting presumptuously in carnal confidence, or in unbelief through diffidence. . . . Not the encountering difficulties therefore makes us to tempt God; but the acting before and without faith. If the Lord has in any measure persuaded His people, as generally He hath, of the lawfulness, nay, of the *duty*, this persuasion prevailing upon the heart is faith; and acting thereupon is acting in faith, and the more the difficulties are, the more the faith."—*Cromwell.*

VERSES 7—13.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.—Ver. 7. And when Boaz. Illustrates the simplicity of ancient patriarchal times and manners (*Lange*). The owners of the crops came every night and slept upon their threshing floors, and this we found to be universal in all the regions of Gaza (*Dr. Robinson*). Had eaten and drunk. An Eastern idea that great men were more kindly disposed after eating (cf. Esth. vii. 3). And his heart was merry [cheerful]. Not necessarily implying any excess (*Sp. Com.*); cheerful and happy over a bountiful harvest (*Steele and Terry*). [Cf. Judg. xix. 6—9; 1 Kings xxi. 7; 2 Sam. xiii. 8.] In Judges xviii. 20; Prov. xv. 15 it denotes gladness without any reference to eating and drinking. Designed to point out the danger encountered by Ruth, and the virtue of Boaz (*Lange*). He went to lie down. Betakes himself to rest in the solitude of the open field (*Lange*). In the open air wrapped up, as it seems, in his cloak (*Wright*). And she came softly. See Judges iv. 21. Secretly (*Keil*). Not so, but quietly, softly—in a muffled manner (*Cassel*). And uncovered his feet. Servants in the East often sleep in this position. If the weather is cold usage allows this using the covering of the master's bed (*Kitto*). And laid her down. And uncovered the skirt of his cloak, and fell (*in sleep*) at his feet (*Syr. Arab*). Natives of the East care little for sleeping accommodation, but rest where weariness overcomes them, lying on the ground (*Postans*).

Ver. 8. The man was afraid [startled, *Lange*]. The Targum renders it, "and trembled"—the translator explaining his sense of the word by the silly gloss, and his flesh was made soft like a turnip (*Wright*). And turned himself. Rather "bent forward," so as to feel what was at his feet (*Speaker's Com.*). Same word as Judges xvi. 29—"took hold of." "Bent over" (*Cappellus, Rosen. Gesen. Bertheau Wright*).

Ver. 9. Who art thou? What is your news? (*Syr.*). What is your state?—*i.e.*, What is the matter with you? (*Arab*). Spread therefore. Lit. And thou hast spread (*Morison*). A request as in *A V* (*Lange, Wordsworth, Wright, &c*). Thy skirt. Thy wings (*Tremel, Junius, Geddes, Bertheau, Keil, Wright, &c.*). Same word as in ii. 12—"Under whose wings thou art come, &c. In Hebrew marriages the bridegroom places his *tallith* on the head of his bride. The phrase indicates receiving the woman in *societatem tori* acknowledging her as a wife (*Speaker's Com.*). Equivalent to "I have made thee my wife," in Ezek. xvi. 8 (*Wright*). We are inclined, however, to adopt the opinion of those who consider the word to be employed metaphorically of protection, as in ii. 12, a much more delicate way for Ruth to intimate her wish (*ibid.*). Let thy name be called upon thine handmaid (cp. Is. iv. 1) by taking her as a wife (*Targum*). But cover thy handmaid with a corner of thy cloak (*Syr.*). A near kinsman [a redeemer] a goel, one that hath a right to redeem.

Ver. 10. Blessed be thou. The same phrase as in ii. 20. Thou hast showed more kindness. Lit. Thou hast made thy last kindness better than the first. The first was faithfulness to her husband and her mother-in-law, the last was her willingness to accept Boaz, aged as he was. This latter feeling, according to Rosenmüller and Bertheau, allied to her attachment to her

former husband, for whom she wished to raise seed (*Wright*). The kindness which thou art showing to thy husband now that he is gone is still greater than that thou didst show to him while he lived (*Michaelis*). Inasmuch as thou followedst. Lit. In not going after the young men, whether [after] a poor one or a rich one.

Ver. 11. My daughter. Continues to speak as one older than herself. Fear not. A common thing to fear where there is intense desire. All that thou required [sayest]. All the city [Lit. gate] cf. Gen. xxxiv. 24; Deut. xvii. 2 [see on iv. 1]. This not to be understood with the Targumist to signify only the council of the elders, but rather to mean all the people who were wont to assemble at the gate (*Wright*). A virtuous woman γυνὴ δυναμεως (*LXX*). Lit. A woman of strength. A good woman (*Lange*). Strong in a moral sense. Corresponds with the common expression, man of valour (*Steele and Terry*). Means that Ruth was strong in all that constitutes female excellence and worth; possessed force of character, &c. The same Hebrew word as in Prov. xxxi. 10: "A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband." Boaz fully justified in ascribing to this very act an honourable principle.

Ver. 12. And now it is true. Truly indeed only a goel am I (*Bertheau*). כִּי in order to strengthen the assurance (*Lange*). Howbeit there is a kinsman [redeemer] nearer than I. But there is also a goel nearer of kin than I (*Speaker's Com.*). From this it appears that Naomi had laboured under some mistake. Probably she was ignorant of the existence of this nearer kinsman (*Steele and Terry*). Or there may have been on her part a knowledge of his inability or unwillingness to act the part of a redeemer (iv. 6). Cox, however, thinks she had a further purpose. Of the women Naomi has the first claim [upon her kinsman]. How is she to show that she waives it in favour of Ruth? Of the men the unnamed kinsman has the first right to redeem. How is Naomi to indicate that she would prefer Boaz? She achieves both points at a stroke by sending Ruth to Boaz [See *Cox*, p. 115—6].

Ver. 13. Tarry this night. Dangerous to return to the city in the darkness, but not in the indistinct twilight (ver. 14). He cannot send her away, nor is he afraid to let her remain (*Lange*). If he will perform the part of a kinsman. Lit. If he will redeem thee (*Lange*). Translate redeem and redeemer throughout the verse.

VERSES 7—14.

Theme.—A Delicate Mission Defended.

"Fie on possession
But if a man be virtuous withal.—*Chaucer.*

And when Boaz had eaten, etc.

We need not dwell on this part of the narrative except to defend it from unfair surmises, and possibly from what men have added to the simplicity of the story. The Scriptures in this very much like human life—we find in them what we take to them. There are who see evil suggestiveness everywhere. The eye, no longer single, the whole world is full of evil. Nothing in these incidents, however, but what is perfectly in accordance with the customs of the East, the habits of the age, or with modesty itself. Note. (*a*) *Men should be judged by the standard of their own times*—especially in matters of custom. While virtue and vice are the same always, manners and customs are continually varying. Note. (*b*) *An Eastern custom not necessarily a bad one because we do not approve of it* (*Cumming*).

Look, 1. At what is certainly known in connection with the incidents before us. (1) That Boaz and Ruth must have come into daily contact during the harvest season. Hence mutual esteem and regard may be expected to have sprung up (ver. 10) possibly admiration and affection. (2) That there were reasons for reticence on the part of Boaz (*a*) his age (*b*) the fact that there was a nearer kinsman. (3) That the widow had a right to claim marriage from the nearest of kin. [For the Levirate marriage, see extract from Lange, and Crit. and Exeg. Notes on ver. 1, 2 &c.]. If any one might criticise, and complain of the project it is Boaz, yet he does nothing but commend, (ver. 11) a plain proof that neither Naomi or Ruth had overstepped what was customary or lawful under the circumstances. No apology was made by Ruth, no surprise expressed by Boaz (*Statham*).

Look again **II. At what fairly may be said in defence of the act.** (1) *It was in general accordance with the usages of the time and place.* The interview in the open air [see Crit. and Exeg. Notes]. The claim made by an act expressive of taking the place of a servant, and of claiming protection (Spread thy skirt, &c.); a more delicate way after all than if done by Ruth in the harvest field before the servants and reapers engaged there. Note. *The transaction concerned only those engaged in it,*—was a matter of the most private and delicate nature. If followed by a refusal on the part of Boaz it was best for both parties, the thing should be kept as a secret. As the issue proved it showed the confidence of both women in the integrity of Boaz. *True love is always bold* and may venture where false would fail. Only in the event of Boaz proving untrue could the end be disastrous, and we may rest assured that Naomi had settled this point to her own satisfaction. She knew her man and acted accordingly. His diffidence must be removed, his recollection of duty stimulated in this abrupt and dramatic way. He must be put upon his honour (*Statham*).

(2) *It was done with a definite end and purpose*, and that in no way connected with intrigue (*a*) to do honour and raise posterity to the dead Mahlon. To the pure all things are pure. Ruth simple concerning evil. Had there been the slightest immodesty in the place it would have tended to have defeated its own purpose and alienated Boaz. (*b*) There was the hope that Boaz would redeem the land (*Braden*).

(3) *It was done by the advice of an elderly and pious woman.* Not an English or European mother, indeed bound by the sensitive conventionalities of a highly-civilised and fastidious society, but an Eastern mother, &c. (*Braden*). Note. *Children do not generally sin in collusion with their elders and parents.*

(4) *This advice doubtless had respect to the upright character and known piety of Boaz.* Ruth sent not to a young man but to one advanced in years, one who had previously commended her purity and worth.

IMPROVEMENT. (1) All agree that this is not to be drawn into a precedent (*M. Henry*); laws, customs, etc. differ now. (2) True also that others may do what it is not wise for us to do, go where it would be dangerous for us to go, (*a*) because ther motives are higher and purer than ours, (*b*) because their spirit is less liable to be influenced by evil. One man is no law to another as to what would be temptation. Every man must judge for himself as in the sight of God [cf. on i. 15, p. 65].

Ver 7. *And when Boaz had eaten and drunk, etc. No asceticism here.* Becomes the rich and great to be generous (*M. Henry*). There is a time to be merry. The phrase here involves *no excess* (see Crit. and Exeg. Notes). Means that he was physically comfortable (*Pulpit Com.*) Note. *Christ's glory to declare the sacredness of all natural enjoyments* (*Robertson*). His first miracle wrought at a marriage feast, at which the language of the master (John ii. 10) tells us there had been, not excess of course, but happiness and merry-making. He himself called a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber.

"There is but one indivisible point from which we should look at a picture; all others are too near or too distant, too high or too low. Perspective fixes this point precisely in the art of painting; but who shall fix it in regard to truth and morals? (*Pascal*). Now, there are a right and a wrong point from which we may judge of the scene described in these verses. Judge of it according to the maxims and the manners of our own age and country, and we shall inevitably fall into a most mistaken estimate of the characters and events that pass before us. We must be fully aware of the peculiarities in ancient manners and laws; we must stand in thought amid the simplicities and catch the colouring of Oriental pastoral life; for this is the "point neither too near nor too distant, neither too high nor too low"—the true perspective position from which to look, and to form a correct moral judgment of the whole transaction.—*Thomson.*

To understand the incidents of this chapter we must have before us the ancient custom and laws of levirate marriage, so called from the Latin word *levir*, a brother-in-law. We meet the first instance of it in Gen. xxxviii. 8, where Judah calls upon his younger son Onan to marry Er's widow, and thus preserve his

brother's name. The custom, however, was not peculiar to the Hebrews solely, but has been found to exist in several eastern countries. The Mosaic law on the subject is given in Deut. xxv. 5—10, and is in substance as follows: If a man die and leave no children, his brother is under obligation to marry the widow, and she has a right to demand it of him. This obligation, however, is not absolutely binding. . . . . From this book of Ruth we see that the levirate law was so contrived that in case the deceased husband had no surviving brother the obligation to marry the widow devolved upon his next nearest kinsman.—*Lange.*

The Hebrew word for this kinsman is גֹּאֵל *goel* which means a *redeemer.* Its root is the exact equivalent of the Greek λυο *to loose*, from which comes the New Testament λυτρον *a ransom.* The meaning of the word is profoundly set forth in the various grand historical unfoldings of its ideas. According to the social philosophy of the Mosaic law no member of the national organisation was to perish, no branch of the tree was to wither; whatever had been dislocated by natural events was to be reset; whatever had been alienated was to be redeemed. This applied to lands as well as to persons; and the duty of redemption rested, as within the nation, so within the families into which the nation branched out. No one could redeem anything for a family who did not belong to it by blood relationship. The Great Liberator of Israel is God. He frees from servitude. For that reason the Messiah who delivers Israel is called Goël-Redeemer. When He appears he will come as Israel's blood relation and brother, as Christ truly was.—*Cassel* (condensed).

We must remember that delicacy as distinguished from morality consists not in any particular action, but in the conformity of that action with the habits of the society in which we live; while morality often requires a sturdy opposition to those very habits. To judge of the morality of an action we must therefore inquire concerning its conformity to the law of God; to judge of its delicacy, its conformity to the law of contemporary opinion. . . . . Nothing can be more unrighteous than the measure which ungodly persons apply to the characters of the Old Testament saints; the nations called Christian and Protestant, receive from the Gospel notions of purity and real delicacy, of which man, without that revelation, has no conceptions. They receive them, but deny or forget the source from whence they came; and, regarding these Gospel sentiments as natural laws, represent these holy men of God as violating the first principles of the natural law of conscience, when, in fact, they were walking fully in accordance with the light they possessed, and earnestly desiring to see the rising of a brighter day.—*Macartney.*

What took you there? What right had you to be there? Those are the critical questions on which everything depends. If you are passing through temptation with your eye fixed on a pure, true life beyond it, temptation being only a necessary stage upon your way, so long as you keep that purpose, that resolution, that ideal, you shall be safe. If you are in temptation with no purpose beyond it, you are lost.—*P. Brooks.*

VERSE 9.

Theme.—A Cry for Shelter and a Claim for Help.

"Therefore I come, thy gentle call obeying,
And lay my sins and sorrows at thy feet,
On everlasting strength my weakness staying,
Clothed in Thy robe of righteousness complete."

Who art thou? I am Ruth, thine handmaid. Spread, therefore, thy skirt [wings] *over thine handmaid.*

This conversation, a strangely interesting and suggestive one. Fear may possess wise and godly men (ver. 8), yet they moderate it and are not overmastered by it. Boaz evidently has both his terror and his passions completely within control.

Evident, too, that both actors in the scene fully understand the meaning and the teaching of the Hebrew law as to the relationship between them. By a very delicate and thoroughly national figure of speech, the same Boaz has himself referred to and used, (ii. 12) Ruth claims the acknowledgment of this relationship. She asks to do with respect to Boaz what he has already seen her do with regard to Jehovah, *i.e.*, take shelter under his protecting wings. And she uses the strongest argument possible in order to prevail, taken alike from the law and

from the word of God, *Thou art a near kinsman.* The fact that she is of Moab can no longer stand in the way. Has he not himself received and treated her as an Israelitish maiden? (*Lange*).

In this act, I. She claims an honourable acknowledgment of the relationship existing between them. He owed it as a duty, she asks it as a right. Mark, too, the petition can no longer be denied without disgrace to one or the other. She comes with boldness, and risks her fair name upon the result. So with Esther going in to Ahasuerus (Est. iv. 15). So with the woman (Luke viii. 43) approaching Christ, upheld by a similar ground of hope, and a like conviction that help lay in Him. Note. *How brave and trusting is such an approach* (*Wordsworth*). This confidence itself is the earnest of success. The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, etc.

So, as between Israel and God, the very same idea is used to convey the idea of covenant relationships recognised as toward His own. "I have spread my skirt over thee," is equivalent to I have made thee my wife (Ezk. xvi. 8).

II. She asks protection and help. Rest under the guardianship of a husband, one of the underlying ideas of the whole book. The covering of the bridegroom's bed called a "wing" among the Hebrews (cf. Deut, xxii. 30). In word and in symbolical action alike Ruth refers to this fact. Note. *Husbands are or should be a protection to their wives.*

These natural relationships have their spiritual analogies. The figurative representation of God in this attitude, as one protecting with outstretched wings, is a common and familiar one in Scripture. [See on "The Sheltering wings," ii. 12, pp. 119, 120.] We have here (1) *a cry* for shelter, (2) *a claim* for assistance. Means take my all under thy care. So sinners come to Christ.

> "Rock of ages cleft for me,
> Let me hide myself in Thee."

III. She renounces all else to make this claim (ver. 10). Her near relationship, her encouragement—she takes Boaz for better or worse. And she does all this with abundant and evident humility, self-abasement, and self-renunciation [cf. on ii. 10, page 111.]

IMPROVEMENT. (1) What a lowly attitude. (2) What a significant one. So the Syrophenician woman came to Christ, content to touch the hem of his garment unobserved. So the Gentile Church comes to Christ, humbly, faithfully, and lovingly (*Wordsworth*).

"In the present day, at a Jewish marriage, they always take up the corner of the plaid or cloak of the bridegroom, and spread it over the head of the bride. I saw in the Roman Catholic Church of Notre Dame a marriage, at which they seemed to retain a fragment of the ancient usage; after the parties were married, and the priest was pronouncing the benediction, he spread a robe over the heads of both—a memorial of the ancient Jewish usage. 'Spread thy skirt over me.'"—*Cumming*

"It is our melancholy and miserable misapprehension, that we fancy there is some reluctance on Christ's part that needs to be overcome, some repulse in His mind that we need to do away with, and that we have to persuade and urge Him to do what we yearn to have done, to forgive us all our sins, and to blot out all our iniquities. This is a great mistake; ten thousand times more willing is Christ to receive you, than ever you were to make application to Him."—*Ibid.*

"'Thou art he that has a right to redeem a family and estate from perishing, and therefore let this ruin be under thy hand; and spread thy skirt over me—be pleased to espouse me and my cause.' Thus must we, by faith, apply ourselves to Jesus Christ as our next kinsman, that is able to redeem us; come under His wings, as we are invited (Matt. xxiii. 37), and beg of Him to spread His skirt over us. Lord Jesus, take me into Thy covenant and under Thy care. I am oppressed, undertake for me."—*Matt. Henry.*

"Marriage is a resting place. The wife finds rest under the protection of her husband, as Israel finds it under the overshadowing wing of Jehovah. Even until the latest times, the figurative representation of God as the living Bridegroom of His people, continues, instructively and sublimely, to run through Scripture and tradition. Christ says, (Matt. xxiii. 37), 'How often,' etc. Israel has rest (menuchah) when God spreads out His wings over them. The Psalmist prays to be covered by the shadow of Jehovah's wings. Boaz says to Ruth (Chap. ii. 12), 'May thy reward be complete, since thou hast come to

take refuge under the wings of Jehovah, the God of Israel.' That which Ruth there did with respect to the God of Boaz, she now asks to be permitted to do with respect to Boaz himself. The husband gives rest to the wife by spreading out his wings over her."—*Lange.*

"Under the shadow of Thy throne
Thy saints have dwelt secure;
Sufficient is Thy arm alone,
And our defence is sure."—*Watts.*

"These times were not delicate. This man, though great in Bethlehem, lays himself down to rest upon a pallet, on the floor of his barn. When he awakes at midnight, no marvel if he were amazed to find himself accompanied. Yet though his heart were cheered with wine, the place solitary, the night silent, the person comely, the invitation plausible, could he not be drawn to a rash act of lust, his appetite could not get the victory of reason, though it had wine and opportunity to help it. Herein Boaz showed himself a great master of his affections that he was able to resist a fit temptation. It is no thanks to many that they are free of some evils. Perhaps they wanted not will, but convenience. But if a man, when he is fitted with all helps to his sin, can repel the pleasure of sin out of conscience, this is true fortitude."—*Bishop Hall.*

VERSES 10, 11.

Theme.—VIRTUE RECOGNISED AND BLESSED.

"A good man's prayers
Will from the deepest dungeon climb to heaven's height,
And bring a blessing down."—*Joanna Baillie.*

Blessed be thou of the Lord, etc. For thou hast shown more kindness, etc. All the city [gate] *doth know that thou art a virtuous woman.*

A good man will not lightly condemn the virtuous for some show of evil (*Bernard*). Boaz instead of blaming Ruth blesses her, and praises her virtue, a significant fact to those who question her conduct. Makes no complaint of being disturbed in the night, nor of too great importunateness (*Lange*). On the other hand entertains no thought of abusing her confidence (*Ibid*). Note (*a*) *Actions are often to be estimated from the character of the actor* (*Lawson*). Some unknown cause may explain away everything that otherwise might seem suspicious. (*b*) *Piety prevails even in a situation like this.* She calls herself "his handmaid," he calls her "his daughter," and the actions of both are in keeping with this.

Dwell **I. On the benediction.** [cf. on II., 4, p. 100; II., 12, p. 116; also on I., 8, 9 p. 38]. May be looked upon either (1) a petition. (2) An expression of good wishes, the opposite of cursing. (3) An affirmation. Note. *The godly although poor may be blessed* (*Bernard*).

Implies (a) *Piety.* Fervent prayer, even when a mere ejaculation or the expression of benevolent desire, *rests upon belief in God* and His willingness to bless. (b) *Deference to the Divine Will.* Bows to that and is in harmony with that. If the words are a mere salutation, they imply sympathy and express friendly and benevolent feelings. How much of the joy and pleasantness of life depends upon a word "fitly spoken!" *These courtesies of life not to be neglected by the true Christian.* Boaz did not forget them even in such a trying situation. They are everywhere sanctioned by Scriptural usage.

II. The Reasons for this expression of goodwill. (1) *Thou hast showed more kindness at the latter end, etc.* The virtuous are better at last than at first (*Bernard*). Thus love grows stronger as difficulties abound; not only begins, but continues its ministry and its mission. So with Ruth. Her affection for the dead Mahlon to be seen in her present act [See on kindness to the dead II., 20]. Note. *Apostates* like Judas, Demas, Alexander (the coppersmith) *were truly good at the first*—grow more evil at the last just because of this (*Bernard*).

(2) *All the city of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman.* A great recommendation—her virtue manifest, known, seen, acknowledged. *Graces may*

exist and yet be hidden. Here they shine forth conspicuous, resplendent. A stranger, a Moabitess, yet not only escaping calumny, but winning favour. Such was Ruth. Note. *Virtue makes even the poor to become famous.*

Her virtue manifested in her circumspect conduct towards the aged and the young, rich and poor alike. Manifested everywhere, recognised *of all.* All the city [gates.] Note. *Character tells everywhere* (*Statham*). The price of such above rubies (Prov. xxxi. 10-31). Her works to praise her in the gates (31).

IMPROVEMENT.—(a) Virtue (1) recognised (2), received (3), rejoiced over (4), rewarded by the godly. Note. *Virtue a means of preferment, a source of praise,* "Blessed be," &c. (b) See how completely Boaz turns what would have been the hour of temptation to many, into a time when his gifts and graces shine out the more conspicuously. What wise counsel, what just and appropriate speech, what careful thoughtfulness for others, what gentleness, courtesy, and benevolence! Note. *Good men praise virtue where others would practise vice.* Its spell holds them in the extremest moments of temptation.

"She calleth herself his 'handmaid;' he calleth her his 'daughter.' There is nothing lost by humility. The humble shall have 'riches, and honour, and life' (Prov. xxiii. 4)."—*Trapp.*

"How blessed is a man the moment his thought has come into the realisation of this God, who is to-day and to-morrow, night and day, at home and abroad, everywhere, thinking of him and interested in him! Not of a God who is penned up behind marble laws; not a God who is afar off, and who requires that some one shall ascend into the heaven and bring him down; but a God with us; a God in us; a God for us."—*Beecher.*

"Exemplary virtue ought to have its due praise (Phil. iv. 8), and it will recommend both men and women to the esteem of the wisest and best. Ruth was a poor woman and poverty often obscures the lustre of virtue: yet Ruth's virtue, even in a mean condition, were generally taken notice of and could not be hid: nay, her virtues took away the reproach of her poverty. If poor people be but good people they shall have honour from God and man. Ruth had been remarkable for her humility, which paved the way to this honour. The less she proclaimed her own goodness the more did her neighbours take notice of it. In the choice of yolk-fellows, virtue should especially be regarded, known approved virtue. Let religion determine the choice, and it will certainly crown the choice and make it comfortable."—*Matt. Henry.*

"Instead of touching her as a wanton, he blesses her as a father, encourages her as a friend, promiseth her as a kinsman, rewards her as a patron, and sends her away laden with hopes and gifts; no less chaste, but more happy than when she came. Oh, admirable temperance, worthy the progenitor of Him in whose lips and heart was no guile!"—*Bishop Hall.*

"A man's nature is best perceived in privateness, for there is no affectation; in passion, for that putteth a man out of his precepts; and in a new case or experiment for there custom leaveth him."—*Bacon.*

"A noble mind!
With this and pleasures under ban,
True faith and holy trust in God,
Thou art the peer of any man."—
Gallagher

VERSES 12, 13.

Theme.—CARE FOR THE CLAIMS OF OTHERS.

Ah me! How dark the discipline of pain,
Were not the suffering follow by the sense
Of infinite rest and infinite release!
This is our consolation!"—*Longfellow.*

Ver. 12, 13. *I am thy near kinsman* [redeemer], *howbeit there is a kinsman nearer than I. If he will perform, etc.* [lit. if he will redeem thee], *but if not then I will, etc.*

Ruth's recompense and rest begins from this hour. The word of an honorable man is pledged. "*Fear not, I will do to thee etc.,*" and she may repose in confidence upon that. Note. *Where a godly and honest man makes a promise there is little fear of failure.* With such to say is to do.

There is a difficulty, however, in the way, of a technical kind indeed, but none the less a difficulty because of that. Evident that Ruth had impressed Boaz favourably, that inclination pointed in the direction outward circumstances and claims were pointing. Note (*a*) *The most subtle and dangerous temptations come in this way.* Come as angels of light, etc. We persuade ourselves we are even serving others and not ourselves. (*b*) *How good men act under such circumstances.* Boaz remembers even in this hour that there is another and a nearer kinsman. Yields the preference to duty, not to inclination.

Suggests **I. Care for the claims of others**—respect for their rights. Note. *Conscientiousness a characteristic of good men always.* Justice to give every one his own, to do to others as we would they should do to us.

(a) *The danger comes from our feelings and desires* in such moments. We naturally seek our own interest, and we are right in doing this, so long as they do not intrude into the sphere sacred to our fellows. Note. *The more ardent the man the more earnest the pursuit,* and therefore the best of men sometimes feel this temptation to step beyond their own sphere the strongest.

(b) *These feelings and desires need to be continually watched.* Very easy to wrong others even in our acts of charity and kindness, much more then in pursuit of our own gratification. Note. (1) *Those nighest to a right are first to be preferred.* (2) *Personal feelings always increase the urgency of the claims of selfishness.* (3) *Grace can conquer even these tendencies in a good man.*

II. Promptness to respond to claims upon ourselves. This request of Ruth's cannot be gainsaid—Boaz does not leave her a moment in doubt. Acknowledges her at once as a kinswoman, and poor as she is, responds to her demand so far as it falls upon him. He himself will prosecute the matter (*Lange*).

(1) *How easy to evade responsibility.* A natural sloth and lethargy of soul towards duty in most men. The priest and the Levite pass by on the other side, leaving the poor wounded and bleeding ones to perish. (Luke x, 31, 32.) (2) *How natural to let it rest upon others,* to lay it upon them, and to criticise them if they fail to respond to it. Note (*a*) *The man who most respects the claims of others is generally the readiest to respond to those upon himself.* Boaz an instance of this: tender, true, conscientious all round. (*b*) *Piety, high principles, true nobility in men run contrary to nature in these things;* make us careful where we are inclined to be careless [in regard to others] and the reverse. (3) *Goodness should show itself in actions,* faith be seen in works, kindliness of heart be manifested in deeds.

Then will I do the part of a kinsman to thee. [Then will I redeem thee] *as the Lord* [Jehovah] *liveth.*

The law made it incumbent on the nearest kinsman to marry the childless widow (Deut. xxv. 5.) so as to redeem the inheritance and prevent the name of the dead husband being forgotten or blotted out. Boaz acknowledges that Ruth's claim cannot be gainsaid. What an encouragement this to the humble seeker! Her rights deferred, not denied.

The Goel or Redeemer here. (1) *Responds to the first application.* No importunity needed. The seeker met half way. The burden and responsibility accepted at once. (2) *Conditionally promises all that is asked.* No right to expect more than a conditional promise. Other rights beyond our own in the universe. (3) *Does so on the existence of God.* "As Jehovah liveth"—a solemn oath, not to be lightly taken, not to be easily put aside. Note. *How strong the hope that is built upon such.* [On the Kinsman Redeemer, see iv. 9-10, p.]

"When Alexander the Great took Tyre he was informed of a young prince who had obtained a high character for virtue, and offered him the crown. The young prince refused it, because he had an elder brother who had a better title than himself to the royal dignity, for they were of the ancient blood of the Tyrian kings. Boaz deserves no less praise than this Tyrian prince. Such a wife as Ruth would have been preferred by Boaz to a royal diadem;

yet he would not take her to himself to wife whilst there lived another man who had a preferable claim to her, if he was willing to make use of his right. We ought to 'look every man not on his own things only but every man also on the things of others.'"—*Lawson.*

"*Howbeit there is a kinsman nearer than I.* There are different degrees of relation, all of which have their respective duties, and their respective rights belonging to them. We sin either by neglecting any of the duties to these relations, or by arrogating the rights peculiar to nearer relations. Boaz would do everything to serve Ruth that became her nearest relation, but one; and this one thing he declined, because he had no right to do it. He would not intrude into the rights of another man till they were voluntarily surrendered. As every man ought to abide in his own calling, so we all ought to keep our own places in society. Much of the unhappiness, and many of the sins of social life originate in that assuming and meddling disposition, which renders some people a pest to their neighbours and still more to themselves."—*Ibid.*

"What true Christian chivalry born of faith, there was in the heart of this Bethlehem yeoman. He was not only sternly honest, but sensitively honorable, bearing his escutcheon without a sinister brand on it. We trace the same quality in some of the most memorable passages in the early life of his illustrious descendant, the greatest of Israel's kings. David knew from the prophet Samuel that he was divinely selected for the throne of the Hebrew Commonwealth. The life of Saul was more than once in his power, and the unrelenting persecution with which he pursued him and sought to destroy him, would have seemed to a conscience that was less informed and scrupulous, almost to warrant his taking his life, and seizing the sceptre as it fell from his hands. But he will not so much as lift up his finger 'against the Lord's anointed,' or ascend to a throne by steps that are stained with blood. He dare not force Providence, or enjoy a blessing while sitting on the grave of a murdered duty. To wait God's time, is to prove that 'We believe in God,' is not only an article in our creed, but an active principle in our Christian life."—*Thomson.*

"A godly life includes every form of moral virtue—temperance, wisdom, fortitude of every kind, moralities, whether on a low scale of individual interest, on a higher scale of society relations, or in the highest form to which patriotism inspires. All these are included in religion.—*Beecher.*

"He is an Israelite, not only before men, but also before God alone. And it was because he did not forget, what man is naturally so prone to forget, that God sees him, that he is so mindful of his duty. Hypocrites, when alone, are different from what they appear in company. Israelites like Boaz feel and act in the presence of the all-knowing God alone not otherwise than they would if all the stars of heaven and all the creatures of earth could testify against them. Boaz showed an active faith when he gave no place to temptation. Pious and offenceless as he was when Ruth came to claim the right of the poor, he is equally so now when she asks for her right of redemption. Then the question was only about a few ears of grain, now it involves his own person and estate. Then he was kind in the presence of Ruth's humility, now he is humble in the presence of her claim to be righted. Then he forgot herself in the fact that she had ever owned another law than that of Israel. Then his tender delicacy made Ruth assured of her safety in his fields; now that same delicacy understands that since she has come to him the right she claims must be fulfilled. He might have released himself by the letter of the law to which she appeals—there was a nearer relative; but his faith is an active faith. The question was one of right, not of ingenious play with the letter. The claimant must be satisfied. And he does what he promised to do."—*Lange.*

"According to its derivations, *goel* means *one who unlooses*,' unlooses that which has been bound, and restores it to its original position. The *goel* did his duty, for example, if he redeemed a promissory note by paying it and handing it back to the man who had given it; or if he had redeemed a piece of land by paying off the liens upon it and restoring it to its original owner; or if he redeemed a captive by paying his ransom and setting him free. So that the fundamental idea of a *goel* was that of a man who redeemed, or set loose, that which had in any way been bound."—*Cox.*

"It is easy to understand, how, in process of time, this title came to be applied both to Jehovah and to Jesus. Jehovah was the Redeemer of Israel; for, again and again, he interposed to save them from captivity, or to ransom them when they had been carried away captives and to preserve them a name and a place in the earth. Jesus is the Redeemer of the whole world; for when we were captives to divers lusts, and groaning under the oppressions of evil, the Son of Man proved Himself our true kinsman by paying a ransom for us and setting us free from our intolerable bonds."—*Ibid.*

VERSES 14—18.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.—Ver. 14. **And she lay at his feet.** Lit. The places of his feet. **Before one could know another.** Lit. Before a man could know his companion. **Recognise his friend** (*Lange*). The Mishna has decided daybreak to begin when it became possible to distinguish between white and blue; R. Mair when a wolf and a dog—R. Akiba

when an ass and a wild ass—could be distinguished. But others said, when one sees and recognises another person at the distance of four ells (*ibid*). **And** [*for*] **he said, Let it not be known.** It might (1) cause scandal, (2) prejudice the other kinsman's choice, (3) render it difficult for him to prosecute his own suit. One suspected of previous intercourse with a foreigner, even though she were a convert, was not allowed to perform the duty of a levirate marriage (*Mishna*). **That a woman.** That "the" woman. The use of the article [the *i.e.*, this woman] forbids us to suppose that these words were actually addressed to Ruth (*Wright*). Luther and Coverdale explain, "And he said in his heart." They express Boaz's opinion which he had previously intimated to Ruth (*Wright*). The Targumist considers it unlikely from the words that Boaz should have been alone in the threshing floor, and renders it, *Boaz said to his young men.* **This** idea, if true, should have its due influence in considering the whole chapter.

Ver. 15. **Bring.** "Allow me." Lit. "Give me." A current phrase of courtesy (*Morison*). **The veil.** Sheet or apron (*Elliot*), wrapper (*Morison*), mantle (*Lange*). It is merely a square piece of cotton cloth, and I have often seen it used for just such service as that to which Ruth applied hers (*Dr. Thomson; Land and Book*). The mantle worn by the poorer classes is very coarse and strong, and large enough to envelope the whole person. The word used here occurs again only in Is. iii. 22, and is translated "wimple." **And he measured six measures of barley.** Lit. **Six of barley.** A considerable load, for he had to put it on her (*Lange*). He measured six sacks (nearly two bushels) of barley, and placed it upon her, and she received strength from the Lord to carry it, and immediately it was said in prophecy that there should come of her the six righteous ones of the world, &c. (*Chaldee Paraphrast*) . The number six is the symbol of labour and service, which is followed by seven, the time of rest (*Lange, Cox*). **She went into the city.** The pronoun is masculine. He, Boaz, went (*Lange*). Possibly at once to settle the matter (?). As in *A V. Wright, Vulg. Syr.*

Ver. 16. **Who art thou?** In what condition? (*i.e.*, in what character?). As the espoused of Boaz, or what? Cp. Judges xviii. 8. (*So Vulg. Bertheau, Michaelis, Maurer, Wordsworth, Steele and Terry, &c.*). Probably still dark when Ruth reached home (*Elliot, Drusius*). Naomi knew her daughter, and addressed her as such (*Bellamy*). How art thou? (*ibid*). **Go not empty.** Not to return as one unappreciated.

Ver. 18. **Sit still.** Remain quiet (*Lange*). Stay quietly at home (*Steele and Terry*). **How the matter will fall.** How it is decreed from heaven (*Targum*). **The man will not be in rest.** Omit "be in" (*Lange*). His actions and his oath show that he will quickly decide the matter.

VERSE 14.

Theme.—Caring for a Good Name.

> "It is a busy talking world
> In which licentious breath blows, like the wind,
> As freely on the palace as the cottage."—*Rowe.*

She rose up before one could know another [Lit. Before a man could recognise his friend]. *And* [for] *he said, let it not be known, that a* [the] *woman, &c.*

Boaz hopes she may escape unobserved. This necessary, lest the rights of the other kinsman might have seemed to have been infringed upon [see Crit. and Exeg. Notes]. They must act not only with strictest honour and propriety, but with the greatest circumspection and care. Note. *Certain situations and circumstances may render it wise and even necessary to do things otherwise uncalled for and improper.* Times when secrecy is a duty. If we have done anything that may expose ourselves or other to unjust suspicion if it were known, it is not inconsistent with integrity to conceal it, providing it can be done without falsehood or dissimulation (*Lawson*).

A. Thomson on this (condensed):—

Let it not be known, etc. We, may generally, suspect the prudence, if not the virtue, of an act when it needs to be concealed. Boaz possibly felt this.

I. The duty of caring for a good name. A treasure no wise man will trifle with. Boaz knew its value—trembled when he found himself unexpectedly in circumstances capable of an injurious construction—sought to screen Ruth from the withering blight of scandal. True (1) that the judgment of men cannot

affect our relation to God; (2) that the approval of conscience is worth more than the applause of a kingdom. Yet there are two things whereof every man should be specially chary and tender—his conscience and his credit (*St. Augustine*). Moral power a divine trust. An equivocal reputation seriously enfeebles or entirely neutralises our influence, and so injures our power of benefiting men and of glorifying God. "The sons of God are to be without rebuke." A good name rather to be chosen than riches. This one of the seals upon the Pentecostal Christians. Said (Acts ii. 46, 47) of them they were "praising God and *having favour with all the people.*"

II. The duty of charity in our judgment of others. Boaz judged of Ruth by himself. In the light of the report of her modest and seemly behaviour, overlooked the boldness of the step because of the virtuous motive that had prompted. The wisest course to form our estimate of a doubtful action by the character of the actor. When we stand in doubt let love turn the scale.

Yet how difficult to teach the grand lesson of charity. Perverse ingenuity puts the worst construction, makes up by surmise what is wanting in evidence, hastens to circulate the slanderous tale, etc. Characteristic, however, of a citizen of Zion that "he taketh not up an evil report against his neighbour."

> "To be noble, we'll be good,
> I live not in myself, but I become
> Portion of that around me."—*Byron.*

Ver. 15. *Bring the veil that thou hast', etc. He measured six measures of barley, etc.* A good man will avail himself of the smallest occasion, the slightest chance of doing good, and conferring benefits upon the worthy. *The liberal heart is never weary of well doing.* Boaz shows himself the same bountiful, large-hearted man in the threshing floor as in the harvest field. [On "Liberal Giving," see II. 15, 16, pp. 127-8.] (1) Here was *tangible proof of his regard and thoughtfulness.* Every grain a testimony to his esteem and affection for the widow of his kinsman. He said, "Go not empty unto thy mother-in-law." Did ever a true man send such "empty" away? (2) *Possibly a gift in part to avert suspicion.* Her appearance laden with grain, would be less likely to attract attention or call for remark, as she generally left the fields of Boaz laden in this way. *A harmless subterfuge unless used to conceal actual guilt.* Everything else of this kind must be judged by the motive behind. (3) *Certainly a significant hint to Naomi.* Said plainly that the claim had in part been responded to. *Lange* and *Cox* see a further significance in the number of measures of barley, *six.* In six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and the seventh the Sabbath of rest follows. [See Crit. and Exeg. Notes.] (?) Naomi would see the grain in bulk, and Ruth's mention of six measures may have been merely accidental. Just possible, however, that Boaz significantly hinted the result in this way, "The day of rest is at hand."

"Here is a very important lesson; we are not only to abstain from what is evil, but from even the appearance of evil. Some people are more zealous in abstaining from the appearance than from the evil; others are more zealous, and truly so, in abstaining from the evil than from the appearance. Our duty is to abstain from both; not only to do no evil, but, as far as in us lies, to give to no man the opportunity of misconstruing the good that we do. We shall not escape misconstruction; it would be wonderful if we did. Misconstructions of piety and Christian character we shall escape; but the misinterpretations of envy, of pride, of jealousy, of ill-nature, which are not yet rooted out of the world, it will be impossible for any man to avoid, do as he please, and therefore the only way is not to notice murmurs that must soon die."—*Cumming.*

"A holy Paul, it has been said, may sometimes be found on board a ship that has Castor and Pollux for its sign. It is recorded of the excellent Bishop Ken, that, when his copy of the Bible was examined after his death, it opened spontaneously at Paul's great chapter of the Corinthians and charity."—*Thomson.*

"There is an over-sensitiveness and over-delicacy which shows not innocence, but an inflammable imagination. The soul spreads its own hue over everything; the shroud or wedding garment of nature is woven in the loom of our own feelings. Persons seem to each man what he is to himself. One who suspects hypocrisy in the world is rarely transparent; the man

constantly on the watch for cheating is generally dishonest; he who suspects impurity is prurient."—*Robertson.*

"If we indulge in a tendency to criticise our neighbour's affairs, we shall soon find ourselves speaking things that, to use Solomon's phrase are 'like the piercings of a sword.' We can easily ruin a noble reputation, just as a mischievous child can pull the most beautiful flower in pieces, but like him, we cannot restore again its symmetry and fragrance. We are more powerful for evil than we think. I am aware that an immense amount of scandal is not malicious in intention, and is uttered unconsciously.

"Evil is wrought from want of thought
As well as want of heart."—*Braden.*

"Christian, behold the kindness and gentleness of Boaz! Will it then be possible that God, when thou art in need, will send thee empty away? Never! His generous hand is never closed. Only open Him thine heart, and divine gifts flow in upon thee without any action on thy part."—*Starke.*

VERSE 18.

Theme.—REST IN OURSELVES AND REST IN ANOTHER.

"Who may not strive, may yet fulfil
The harder task of standing still,
And good but wished with God is done."—*Whittier.*

Sit still [Remain quiet] *my daughter until thou know, etc. For the man will not rest.*

The Hebrew bride had to remain at home until her affianced husband came to fetch her (*Cox*). Naomi's advice is evidently that Ruth shall take this position. Mark, however! *The command only follows strenuous effort.* She has done all that she could, all that lay on her side. Now she must wait, not be perplexed, not unduly anxious. Rest in herself, in her own mind, is to foreshadow and be the earnest of *rest in the house of a husband* [cf. on I. 9; III. i.].

Dwell, **I. On the principle underlying this injunction.** A time to speak and a time to be silent; a time to act and a time to "sit still"; a time for enterprise and a time for remaining quiet; a time to work and a time to wait. Note. *Two sides to life, the active and passive*, and both necessary. Night the counterpart and complement of day, rest and sleep of toil and activity. Men must fall in with the claims of the one as of the other; respond to the laws of "rest" as of motion, quietness, as of activity. Note. A lesson for this busy age here.

"The world is too much with us: late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers."—*Wordsworth.*

Men are naturally restless in critical moments like this. The mind anxious, perplexed, etc. Yet it may pre-eminently be our duty to sit still then, (*a*) *because it is the Divine will.* God said to Israel at the most critical moment in her history, the sea in front, the mountains on either hand, the enemy behind, "Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord" (Ex. xiv. 13). So in another critical moment, "Who is among you . . . that walketh in darkness and hath no light, let him trust in the name of the Lord, and *stay* upon His God" (Is. l. 10). Note. *In such moments our strength is to sit still*, even when we are saying with Saul, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?"

(*b*) *Because it is the only wise course.* What can be done by disquieting and anxious thoughts? Ruth, for instance, could not alter the laws of the country.

Note. (1) *There are times when it is a waste of power to make further effort, and a waste of feeling to allow anxiety to distress the heart* (*Rudford Thomas*). The Psalmist pictures such a moment (Ps. xxxvii.) when men would naturally be fretful and anxious; and the exhortation to such is, "Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him" (v. 7 cf. also 1—3).

Note. (2) *There are times when we are simply helpless, and effort is impossible.*

Sitting still certainly justified then. This the underlying thought in Milton's exquisite "Sonnet on his own Blindness":—

"Doth God exact day-labour, light denied?
* * * * *
God doth not need
Either man's works or his own gifts.
* * * * *
They also serve who only stand and wait."

A lesson here for those laid aside by sickness and infirmity. Providence is saying to such, "Sit still." Difficult, but not impossible, to wait while others work. God's message to such, "In quietness and confidence shall be your strength" (Isaiah xxx. 15).

II. The reasons given here for this injunction. (1) *To give time and past effort a fair chance.* "Until thou know how the matter will fall." Sometimes wise to wait for the sake of observation—where we are, what we have already done. The traveller has to pause to find his bearings, the sculptor to see the effect of the blow he has already given. *Restlessness condemned here*, that restlessness which would be for ever rooting in the earth to see whether the seed is growing. Note. *Faith and patience are essentials in human life.* A lesson to Christian ministers, among others. Preach, labour in season, out of season, etc.; but learn also to wait, to rest in the promises, to leave the results with God. *Over-doing condemned here*, that overdoing which undoes all that already has been done.

(2) *To give time and the efforts of others a fair chance.* "For the man will not rest until he have finished the thing." The past had proved how true and honourable Boaz was—how much to be depended on. Note. (*a*) *We sit still the more readily when we know that others are engaged on our behalf.* Nay, we are such, so weak in ourselves, that *we never find rest at all until we find rest in another.* A deep principle here which lies at the foundation of the marriage relationship (iii. 1). Note. (*b*) *The whole Christian economy and scheme of redemption rests upon this fact, that man needs help from without*—that he cannot save himself, and that he cannot "rest" until he finds it.

LESSONS.—(1) We may "sit still" when duty has been loyally performed. (2) When another who is competent has undertaken for us. Note. (a) *He who rests in Christ rests not without reason;* has found an advocate, brother, friend, kinsman, Saviour, Redeemer; his confidence is not that of the slothful, or the careless. (b) *He that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works* (Heb. iv, 10). Mary rather than Martha the type of Christian discipleship (Luke x, 42).

Theme.—PROMPTITUDE IN DUTIES, SECULAR OR SACRED.

"Make haste O man to do
Whatever must be done;
Thou hast no time to lose in sloth,
Thy day will soon be done."—*Bonar.*

Dr. A. Thomson (condensed) on *The man will not* [be in (omit)] *rest until he have finished the thing this day.*

This favourable estimate Naomi had formed of the character of Boaz. A man who meant what he said and did it—not only held a promise sacred, but went about its fulfilment with a will. Did the right thing at the right time—a person of probity and promptitude.

Another passage of Scripture kindred to this (Ezra iii. 4). The Israelites, on their return from Babylon, again offered the daily sacrifice "*according to the custom as the duty of the day required.*" A rich ethical meaning in this word "duty"—

something due by us to God. When it is said we "ought" to do a thing, it means we owe it to God to do it. Not only with the Israelites no omission, but no delay until the morrow. Not "like silver bells out of tune," their clock always seemed to strike at the right moment. Note. *One of our Saxon Kings called Ethelred the Unready.* The subject then, punctuality and promptitude in duties, whether secular or sacred.

I. Certain rules which are indispensable if this is to be our characteristic and habit. (*a*) *Not to undertake too much work*, grasp at more engagements than there is a reasonable likelihood of being able to accomplish. (*b*) *Endeavour by forethough to make the most of every hour.* Wise arrangement makes work easier and the day longer, just as careful packing makes a box contain twice as much, etc. (*c*) *Must be no indolent procrastination* or giving away before little difficulties. Keep ourselves masters of circumstances. Examples. (1) Eliezer of Damascus sent to seek a wife for Isaac. What deliberation! What concentration of aim! What promptitude! (2) Nehemiah building the ruined wall of Jerusalem. Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with *all thy might!*

The benefits of this ordering of time various and great. Makes what we do likely to be well done, saves time, conscience, temper, etc.

II. Apply the principle to some things in detail, *e.g.* the matter of personal salvation. Every other interest should be made to stand aside as a "grand impertinence" until the man "has given heed to the things of his peace."

Assuming the supreme interest has been cared for. (1) *There are certain duties which regularly fall to be performed by us, and which may be described as the work of every day*, recur almost as regularly as the rising and setting of the sun, or the ebbing and flowing of the ocean tides. (*a*) The duties of our stated secular vocation. Daily summoned anew in these to serve God. Whatever ye do, in word or deed, etc. (Col. iii. 17). Paul exemplified his own rule, preaching Christ, and making tents at Corinth. The Christian disciple may find in every hour of his daily toil—

> "Room to deny himself, a road
> To bring him daily nearer God."

(*b*) The more direct exercises of religion, especially secret devotion, prayer, reading of God's Word, etc.

(2) *There is another class of special duties appropriate to particular times and circumstances*, which may be said to grow out of them. (*a*) "The weekly rest of the Lord's day," (*b*) "Last will and testament." Saves family discord. Do it at once. The work of the day should be done in the day. (*c*) Reconciliation with friend or brother. Be magnanimous, "not in rest," until you have finished the thing this day." (*d*) Warning friend gradually coming under evil habits. (*e*) Succouring the widow, speaking a seasonable word for those who are struggling. Make haste! To-morrow may be too late. Finish the thing this day.

There are opportunities for doing good, which, if allowed to pass unimproved, can never return. It is often now or never. Other chances or ways may be presented, but this particular service never again. The disciples in Gethsemane lost a golden opportunity. Hence Christ's words of disappointment, "Sleep on now," etc. So with our words of warning and acts of goodness. If omitted, the opportunity will never return. Oh, sad neglect! cruel procrastination!—

> "Make haste O man to live,
> Thy time is almost o'er;
> O sleep not, dream not, but arise—
> The Judge is at the door."

"What could she now do better than to sit still, resigning herself to the providence of God. Things that will happen cannot be prevented by our utmost solicitude. Things not appointed will never take place if all the care, and all the toil of men and angels were jointly employed to bring them about."—*Lawson.*

"We live one day at a time. God has but laid upon us the burden of one day. If we will attend to daily duty and daily devotion,

if we will do the thing He commands, though not knowing whither they may tend, or how they will bring about good, He will see to the issue."—*Lynch.*

"Defer nothing till to-morrow that may as well be done to-day, either for yourselves or for your friends. 'Who knows what a day will bring forth?' It is said of Richard II. that he lost his crown and life by being a day too late in coming to join his army in Wales."—*Lawson.*

"It would be well if this testimony could always be borne to us, that we would not be in rest till we had fulfilled the duty that was once fairly laid before us."—*Macartney.*

"It is a comfort to have dealings with such men [as Boaz]. They do not promise and forget to perform, but are men of honour, straightforward, energetic, doing well, while other dilatory people would be dreaming about it."—*Braden.*

"There are some men who are never in good time for anything. They appear to have put the clock of their time ten minutes too late for life."—*Hamilton.*

"The road of by-and-by leads to the town of never. That which the fool does in the end the wise man does in the beginning."—*Spanish Proverbs.*

"Have you ever seen those marble statues in some public square or garden, which art has so fashioned into a perennial fountain, that through the lips or through the hands the clear water flows in a perpetual stream, on and on for ever; and the marble stands there—passive, cold—making no effort to arrest the gliding water. It is so that Time flows through the hands of men . . . . so that the destiny of nine men out of ten accomplishes itself slipping away from them, aimless, useless, till it is too late."—*Robertson.*

"No rest until work be done, until duty be fulfilled! Then rest can never be ours here, but yonder, for here work is never done."—*B.*

CHAPTER IV.

THE GOEL AT THE GATE.

CONTENTS.—*Boaz in the presence of the elders of Bethlehem obtains the right of redeeming the inheritance of the dead Elimelech. Amid the acclamations and congratulations of the people at the gate, he publicly takes Ruth to be his wife. Obed is born, and the generations of Pharez are traced as far downward as David.*

VERSES 1-10.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.—Ver. 1. **Then went Boaz up.** Bethlehem situated on a hill, while the cornfields and threshing floor would be in the valley below [cf. on ii. 4, p. 101, also p. 6.] **The gate.** The place of resort where business was transacted. I have seen in certain places, Joppa for example, the Kady and his Court sitting at the entrance of the gate hearing and adjudicating all sorts of causes in the audience of all that went in and out thereat (*Thomson*). **And sat.** Stone seats would be there. The attitude expressive of deliberation. Eastern people are never in a hurry at such times. The judges sat in the gates that the country people might not be compelled to enter the cities and so suffer detriment (*Lange*). **And behold.** Set forth as with a starry note (*Trapp*). Possibly calls attention to the fortunate coincidence or Providence of the thing. Lange thinks Boaz came early not to miss his man. **Ho such a one.** *κρύψις* hidden one (LXX). Conveys the idea of his being kept anonymous purposely. The Hebrew words *peloni almoni* are derived from *palah* to distinguish, to point out, and *alam* to conceal (*Gesen* 53, 677), and signify a person who is pointed out, but whose name is concealed (*Wordsworth*). At present any anonymous donor to the synagogue funds is habitually styled "*Almoni Peloni*" (*Picciotto*). The name of the kinsman was Tob (*Midrash*). Impossible (*Lange*).

Ver. 2. **And he took ten men.** So Abraham bargained for a place of sepulchre in the field of Machpelah, in the presence of those who stood at the gate of Hebron (Gen. xxiii. 17, 18). Possibly ten were chosen because it was a perfect number. The requisite number for a local court of magistracy (*Groser*). In later days ten men were needed to form a worshipping assembly in the synagogue (*Ibid.*). **Of the elders of the city.** Elderly persons of the city (*Morison*).

Ver. 3. **And he said unto the kinsman** [redeemer.] The narrator again avoids using the name, though there is little doubt it must have been known.

Naomi that is come again. The Athenians had a law, that no woman should be permitted to plead her own cause. The custom of all Eastern nations lay in the same direction. **Selleth** [sold] **a parcel of land.** Rather, hath sold (*Wordsworth, Lange, Wright*). Naomi had already sold her interest in the land during the terms of years that intervened between the date of sale and the year of jubilee, when the land would revert to the representatives of Elimelech; **and the nearest of kin could** [only] gain immediate possession by redeeming it,

that is, by paying the worth of the land during the term of years which still remained to the jubilee (*Wordsworth*). She had mortgaged her own and Ruth's life interest in the land (*Braden*). That, contrary to the opinion of the earlier commentators, a widow could do this —see *Lange in loco*. Probable that Elimelech had sold his interest before he went into the land of Moab (*Elliot*). In this case, the reversionary interest of Ruth, as the widow of Mahlon, would have to be purchased by the next of kin, as well as the life interest of Naomi (*Ibid*). Others think that the destitution of the widows arose, not from having lost their property, but from their inability to turn it to a profitable account. Morison views the use of the perfect here as expressing such an unalterable determination to sell the land, that it may be looked upon as already accomplished, and translates "Has resolved to sell," So *Drusius, Vatable, etc.* "Offers for sale" (*Luther, Coverdale*). She may have put up the land for sale, for the express purpose of putting the law in motion, and compelling her kinsman to redeem it (*Cox*). Our brother Elimelech's. Or kinsman Elimelech's. The word not to be interpreted in a strict sense [cf. on II. 1 Crit. and Exeg. Notes, p. 89.]

Ver. 4. And I thought to advertise the—Determined to inform thee (*Lange*). Lit., I said I will uncover thine ear; ἀποκαλνψω τὸ οὖς σου (LXX.), by lifting up the hair which covers it [cp. 1 Sam. ix. 15; 2 Sam. vii. 27] (*Wordsworth*). Buy it before the inhabitants. In the presence of those sitting here (LXX. Vulg. Syr. Arab). So also Lange, Wordsworth, etc. If thou wilt not redeem it. The Text. Recept. reads, "If *he* will not. The common reading is supported by Schmidt, Lange, Carpzov, Keil, etc., and is more natural. So fifty MSS. in Kennicott (*Wordsworth*). And he said, I will redeem. Shows he had the ability. Would add to his own estate to procure the property of the dead Elimelech. Supposed he would only have to pay Naomi a certain annual allowance till her death, and the inheritance would pass to him as the lawful heir (*Steele and Terry.*)

Ver. 5. Thou must buy [thou buyest] it also of Ruth. Must take the widow of Mahlon who had a claim upon the land. The children born of such a marriage would inherit the state, to the exclusion of children by an earlier wife. Would stand as the direct descendants of Mahlon, and be called by his name. The Moabitess. Here was the difficulty, and Boaz presents it thus fairly and delicately. The goel does not lay hold of the fact that the law against marriage with a Moabitess, if such existed [cf. on I 4] may have been suspended because Ruth had cast in her lot with Israel.

Ver. 6. I cannot. Means I will not for certain reasons [ver. 4]. The Targum says he had a wife and children. Lest I mar [injure] mine own inheritance. By spending time and attention besides money upon that which would revert to the name and estate of another. This possibly only an excuse. The true reason found in his superstitious fears. Thinks he ought not to take into his house a woman marriage with whom has already been visited with the extinguishment [according to popular ideas] of a family in Israel (*Lange*).

Ver. 7. Now this was the manner in former times concerning &c. Formerly in cases of redemption and exchange (*Lange*). That is in every bargain this was done. Shews that considerable time must have elapsed between the events recorded and the writing of the story. An old custom has fallen into partial disuse in the meantime [cf. Intro. p. 4]. A man plucked off his shoe and gave it to his neighbour. A man pulled off his shoe and gave it to the other (*Lange*). In acknowledgement that he to whom the shoe was given might tread and own where he the seller had previously stood as owner. The shoe is the symbol (1) of motion and wandering, (2) of rest and possession (*Lange*). When the prodigal is reinstated, he has shoes put on his feet (Luke xv. 22) (cf. also Ex. iii. 5; Eph. vi. 15).

Ver. 8. So he drew off his shoe, i.e., the kinsman drew it off, and so surrenders all claims. The woman had the right in ordinary cases to pluck the shoe off herself and spit in the face of the kinsman—a great dishonour [cf. Deut. xxv. 7]. This shews that the present case was looked upon as exceptional. When an Arab divorces his wife, he says of her, "She was my slipper and I cast her off," (*Thomson*).

Ver. 9. And Boaz said. He addresses the elders in their representative character. Under the theocracy the principle of representation was early carried out (*E. Price*). Possibly a pause follows v. 8, during which Naomi and Ruth may have been brought upon the scene. Ye are witnesses. Settled deeds of compact in our modern sense not used or needed. Enough, in a simple primitive age, that a solemn transaction should be committed to the memory of the people (*E. Price*). I have bought [acquired] all that was, etc. The three dead relatives are mentioned with legal precision and particularity, although no mention is anywhere made of Orpah's claim, which, in contradistinction to Ruth's, is looked upon as forfeited or lapsed, if it ever existed. Of the hand of Naomi. Evidently looked upon as heir to the property now her sons are dead. To use a modern legal phrase, she was considered as a trustee until the birth of a male child (*E. Price*).

Ver. 10. Ruth the Moabitess. Deut. xxiii. 3. refers to males, not to women (*Keil, E. Price*), as with Canaanitish women [Deut. vii. 3]. Have I purchased. Acquired (*Lange*). Means to obtain, to acquire, which may be done in a variety of ways. The use of the word "purchased" unfortunate (*Ibid*). To raise up the name, etc. A Hebraism signifying the continuance of the relation he had sustained in the genealogy of his tribe (*E. Price*). From v. 21 it would seem as though popular opinion were too strongly in favour of Boaz to allow the usual law to come in to operation. The gate of his place. The Chaldee reads, "the sanhedrim of his place," introducing a later idea (*E. Price*).

VERSE 1—5.

Theme.—FRIENDS IN COUNCIL.

"And next the valley is the hill aloft.
And next the darke night is the glad morrow,
And also joy is next the fine of sorrow."—*Chaucer.*

Then went Boaz up to the gate.

The interesting and fascinating story draws near to its proper conclusion. Ruth's virtue has been seen "in all the gate"; now her reward and recompense are to be as plainly apparent there. Another,—a *goel*, a redeemer has undertaken to perform the duties which fall upon him. Note. (1) *Here is an image of the final perseverance of the saints.* Continuing first, then crowned afterwards, steadfast under discipline and temptation, then to be owned of Christ, and manifested to all as His own in the day of His glory (Rev. iii. 5, etc.). (2) *Here is a picture and illustration of virtue triumphant* true to all ages. After humiliation, exaltation, after the bitter, sweet, after mourning, joy. So with Joseph in Egypt, Moses, David, etc.

It is not Ruth, however, so much who claims attention for the present, as her goel intent on her behalf. We have seen Boaz "diligent in business (ii. 4, iii. 2), fervent in spirit" (ii. 4, 12), courteous (ii. 4), quick to perceive goodness in others (ii. 11, iii. 10, 11), ready to encourage and commend it (ii. 12, iii. 10), generous and hospitable (ii. 8, 9, 14-16, iii. 15), wise and circumspect, and having his own spirit under complete control, in what otherwise might have been the hour of temptation (iii. 10-14), acting always as in the presence of God. And here we are to see him as possessing other qualities, which go to make up the hero, and the true man, one commanding respect not less by his moral earnestness and diligence than by his wealth and social rank. We follow him to the gate and see him among his peers, evidently received as few men in Bethlehem would be.

I. This is how business should be attended to.

(1) *Speedily.* The man is in earnest, "will not rest until he has finished the thing." Gets up early to catch his man [see Crit. and Exeg. III. 15, p. 160].

(2) *Expeditiously.* Will finish it before the day is over [see on III. 18, p. 164]. All that has ever been said in praise of the diligent may be said of Boaz here.

(3) *Righteously.* In the spirit of candour and fair dealing. Hence he seeks the advice of friends: "the Council at the gate." Conceals nothing, overstates nothing, speaks apparently without bias. In few and fit words he propounds the cause and brings it to an issue (*Trapp*). Note. (*a*) *That a true and right result may be obtained in this simple honourable way.* Crooked courses are not always the best courses. (*b*) *An example of the right use of arbitration* which might often be followed with advantage. The justice may be administered in a rough and ready way to our Western ideas, but it is justice none the less that is sought and obtained. And the decision arrived at will be solemnly ratified as in the sight of God.

Note.—(*a*) *That which is done with the heart is done with cheerfulness and readiness.* Love lends wings to the feet, and strength to the hands, and persuasive eloquence to the tongue. So with Boaz in the chapter before us. Duty and affection alike urge him. (*b*) *When God appoints, he prospers and gives wisdom in the direction of the affair.* How much there is to be admired in the way Boaz proceeds to settle this delicate affair once and for all. And as if the Divine favour is to rest upon him at once, the man he seeks and upon whom everything depends comes by as soon as the business is fairly set afloat [On Seeming Chances, Real Providences, see II. 3, p. 95-6].

(4) *An honourable man's dealings while perfectly frank and open are not to be deficient in wise circumspection.* Boaz having to do with a wily worldling deals warily with him (*Trapp*). Tells him first of the land, and then of the wife that must go along with it (*Ibid*). The man of God is to be wise as well as harmless in his dealings with men.

II. This is how difficult affairs should be settled, delicate claims adjusted, fair rights allowed and satisfied.

(1) *Openly and publicly.* That is unless scrupulous justice can be administered privately in a better way. The rights between man and man must not be left to chance or fraud. Note. (*a*) *Greed and rapacity flourish best in secret.* Naturally seek to hide their deeds. Honest men can bear and covet the light. (*b*) *The fountains of justice are best kept pure by being constantly open to public inspection.*

(2) *By the advice of wise men.* We have here an old world picture of a city council. (*a*) Abundance of witnesses to attest the proceedings, (*b*) of counsellors to give advice, (*c*) of judges to determine difficulties. "In the mouth of two or three witnesses" every word would "be established;" while "in the multitude of counsellors" there would be "safety." Notice again they were the choice men of the city—aged, experienced—elderly men upon whom devolved the conducting of affairs in Bethlehem. Note. *Age and experience give weight to advice and decisions.*

(3) *Calmly and deliberately.* They sat down. Undue haste to be deprecated in conducting important affairs like these.

(4) *With care and exactitude.* Business should be done in a business-like manner, not only to make provision against defects in integrity, but also to prevent difficulties arising from failures in memory, &c. Note. *A Scripture precedent here for scrupulous exactness in transactions like these,* transactions involving questions of property. You have the wisdom, dignity and grave deliberation, the solemn careful procedure such a case demanded.

III. This is the way the affairs of the destitute and needy especially should be attended to. All this for two poor widows! *Yes, but this is the public care.* "The poor ye have always with you." It was no personal concern of these elders and yet they gave time and attention to it, and that readily. Note. *Thus early in human history the claims of the weak were recognised and responded to publicly.* Christ answers the question so often asked as to "Who is responsible?" in the parable of the Good Samaritan. So the Apostle, Bear ye one another's burdens, &c.; Look not every man on his own things, &c. (Phil. ii, 4).

E. Price on this: *Theme.*—RESPECT FOR PROPERTY.

The modern war against property can never be justified by the far-seeing Laws of Moses. And, of course, Boaz would hold himself bound to observe them, as here illustrated.

1. He conforms to the letter of the enactment as for as possible.
2. He avows the fact publicly: before the elders and the people.
3. He evokes the confirmatory act of adequate witnesses.
4. He, nevertheless, is careful in stating his claims in order to enforce his full rights.

Observe then, how it was through the sanctified 'property' the hopes of the world were met, in the advent of the Messiah. And (2) how the observance of righteous rules respecting this 'property,' restricts no man's real liberty.

"The gates of ancient cities played many parts: they were guard-houses; they were markets, they were courts of justice; they were places for public deliberation and audience. Necessarily, therefore, they were massively built, with recessed chambers or divans in the sides, and often with chambers also above the arch. Here the inhabitants of the city were wont to assemble, either for the transaction of business or to hear and tell the

news. Here the judges sat and administered justice to all comers. Here even kings came to give audience to other kings, or to their ambassadors. Some faint resemblance to these ancient gates may be found in the structures called 'Bars,' in London and Southampton, though these modern gates are much smaller than their ancient prototypes; and some faint reminiscence of their character as seats of judicial and royal authority in the titles Sublime Porte, or the Ottoman Porte—porte meaning gate—by which the Government of Turkey is still designated."—*Cox.*

"Boaz was worthy of the confidence reposed in him. He at once seeks the nearer kinsman, and brings the matter to a decided issue. How many an hour of bitter anxiety, of suspense—a form of anguish harder to bear than the certainty of disappointment—have the unhappy to undergo, simply because those who have undertaken their cause, gratulating themselves on the benevolence of their intentions seem to think that, if they accomplish the service, the time and manner are of no importance, but that in these they may suit their own convenience. If, like Boaz, we would judge the fatherless, and plead for the widow, let us, like him, 'not be in rest until we have finished the thing.'"—*Macartney.*

"'Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!' He knew the preference which both Naomi and Ruth had for himself; he was conscious too that he no longer regarded with indifference this beautiful daughter of Moab, who had 'come to trust beneath Jehovah's wings;' nor was he unwilling to pay even more for the redemption of the inheritance than this nearest kinsman. But he 'would not go beyond or defraud his brother,' or in the least take advantage either of his ignorance or of Ruth's preference. All was open and above-board. His fine sense of honour was not blunted either by covetousness or by inclination, nor would his conscience allow him, even when seeking a good and generous end, to have recourse to sharp practice. Here is that 'clear and round dealing which is the honour of man's nature.'"—*Thomson.*

"Aristides being judge between private persons, one of them declared that his adversary had greatly injured Aristides. 'Relate rather, good friend,' said he interrupting him, 'what wrong he hath done thee, for it is thy cause not mine, that I now sit judge of.' Being desired by Simonides, the poet, who had a cause to try before him, to stretch a point in his favour, he replied: 'As you would not be a good poet if your lines ran contrary to the just measures and rules of your art; so neither should I be a good judge or an honest man if I decided aught in opposition to law and justice."—*Percy Anecdotes.*

"There then is the court of justice. How simple! How primitive! No lawyers and expensive forms; no long rhetorical arguments; but a quiet deliberative meeting, in which the persons concerned 'sit' and talk over the whole affair. Perhaps many a tangled matter would soon come out straight, many a dispute be quickly settled, if at first people would submit it to some such Board of Arbitration."—*Braden.*

VERSE 6.

Theme.—A SHORTSIGHTED POLICY AND ITS MERITED OBLIVION.

"Despite those titles, power and pelf,
The wretch, concentred all in self,
Living shall forfeit fair renown,
And, doubly dying, shall go down
To the vile dust from whence he sprung,
Unwept, unhonoured and unsung."—*Scott.*

I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I mar mine own inheritance.

The kinsman's conduct here stands out as a contrast for all time with that of Boaz. Are we wrong in seeing in him an example of the mean equivocating worldling? When it is a question of the land (ver. 4) he will redeem, but when it is a question of the law which binds him to succour the widow as well as take possession of the land, he hesitates. He stands as a representative of that large class who say "I cannot" to every appeal. Note (*a*) *Something will always come in to hinder from the path of duty if we will allow it.* "A lion in every street." No man ever equivocated, or prevaricated in such a moment but the devil helped him to a sufficient and plausible excuse. (*b*) *We may miss or misuse the one opportunity in life.* This man did so undoubtedly. May be profitable to look,

I. At some of the probable reasons for his action.

(I) *A prejudice, and belief in a common superstition.* Ruth a Moabitess. In Israel marriage with the daughter of an alien race was held to be

"unlucky" even when it was lawful (*Cox*). No doubt, the popular voice affirmed that Mahlon and Chilion were cut off before their time because they married strange women (*Ibid.*) How superstitious fear rides some men against the plainest dictates of reason! It needs a strong mind, a truly noble spirit to shake off the control of popular opinion, to say nothing of popular superstition. No matter that Ruth's virtues are known "in all the gate." That shadowy, impalpable, intangible something which fear conjures up in the hearts of so many comes in probably to decide the question.

(2) *Selfish regard for his own inheritance.* Every way the thing must have seemed undesirable to such a man, indeed to most men. Ruth was poor, so was Naomi, and he must take charge of both—a double burden. If an heir should be born, he would be called by the name of Mahlon,—if more children, the inheritance would have to be divided among many. A shrewd, selfish man would be sure to say "No" under such circumstances, and the unnamed kinsman seems to have been such. (*a*) Took no care (*b*) made no enquiries about the widows until forced to do so thus publicly. *A type of those who fear trouble and so say nothing.* Let wrong continue, fraud, want, &c., multiply and go on their way as if they were neither responsible to God or man. Note on the other hand *a danger from excess either way.* Some will have to say at last "They made me keeper of the king's vineyard, but *mine own vineyard have I not kept.*" No man is asked to neglect his own affairs, to their serious detriment.

(3) *Want of a chivalrous and heroic spirit.* This the secret of all else. The duty was clear, but the man was living in that state when duty is only felt as a burden. Of course there were difficulties, but they were just of that kind that a true unselfish man, would be delighted to overcome. Possibly the man was a just man according to his lights (*Cox*). May have honestly doubted whether he was bound to marry Mahlon's *Moabitish* widow. Probably one of those cautious, common-place souls, who fail under severe tests, and in critical moments, when the law seems doubtful, and prudence can only discuss the question from a selfish standpoint, and who fail just *for want of that larger vision, which looks at the spirit, not at the letter.* So Orpah failed where Ruth triumphed [cf. on I 14 p. 53; also on p. 60]. So Lot was led to the land of Sodom and Gomorrah, while Abraham remained with God to receive the promises (Gen. xiii. 10—17). So the kinsman as contrasting with Boaz. So the "child of sense" always as contrasting with the child of the spirit. Note! *The reluctance and inability of the mere natural man to undertake and effect the work of doing and suffering* (*Wordsworth*).

Look **II. At some of the certain results of his action.**

His name is studiously avoided in the Scriptures, simply called "such a one," almost an epithet of contempt. Note. *There is an over-cautious, calculating selfishness which misses its mark by over-shrewdness.*

This man sought fame and the remembrance a large inheritance would give, and this is what he found—feared that his "name" would be cut off from Israel, and his inheritance marred, since his children would be called by the name of another, and so *he denied himself and let another go down to posterity as redeemer.* Curious he is unnamed in the very book which recounts his story. We know him simply as the "anonymous kinsman" (*Cox*). His miserable, narrow policy brought its own defeat, while Boaz, who had no such selfish desire or ambition, lives in the pages of inspiration as the ancestor of Christ Himself. Note. *A principle in this.* Impossible that men should live both for the present and future, in many senses. The immediate policy often seems best when it is a

selfish one, a narrow, degraded one. But wait! True, men exist from day to day by care and industry, but they live to posterity by virtue of unselfish and heroic deeds. There is a losing the life which is a saving it. Live to yourself and you perish with the present, but live for others, and the memory will be fresh and fragrant when you have passed away. Men speedily forget everything but goodness.

> "Only the actions of the just
> Smell sweet and blossom in the dust."—*Shirley.*

IMPROVEMENT. (1) The desire for fame natural to the human breast. Nothing so wrong in it after all. The desire to leave an inheritance behind not uncommon—not to be condemned of itself. The whole question is as to how the accomplishment of these desires is pursued, whether (a) To the forgetfulness of other claims and duties as here; (b) To the neglect of others' rights. Then be sure it is a short-sighted policy, seen through by men, condemned of God? Best to do our duty, and leave the question of fame and heritage, as everything else, with Him!

(2)

> "If souls be made of earthly mould
> Let them love gold;
> If born on high,
> Let them unto their kindred fly."—*Herbert.*

(3) What is a hard duty to the worldling may show itself a delightful pleasure to the good man—to the man of God.

(4) *Lest I mar mine inheritance.* (1) How easy to do this. (2) In how many ways it may be done—ways of which we have no conception at the time. Striving to save it we may lose it, as this man did. (3) How many do this? (*a*) Ruin health, (*b*) lose reputation, (*c*) make the estate bankrupt, (*d*) cast faith aside, etc.

"How very ready are we to acknowledge duties which are likely to benefit ourselves."—*Macartney.*

"This person readily owned himself Elimelech's near relation and next kinsman, when the remnant of his property was to be got, and then he had plenty of money for the redemption: but when other duties were presented to him—when he was reminded that there were widows to be cherished, as well as fields to be grasped—then he discovered the danger to his own inheritance."—*Macartney.*

"This makes many shy of the great redemption, they are not willing to espouse religion. Heaven they could be glad of, but holiness they can dispense with; it will not agree with the lust they have already espoused and therefore let who will purchase Heaven at that rate they cannot."—*M. Henry.*

"When a man finds that he is living from conscience, and not from trust and love and peace; when he finds that he has not spontaneity nor generous impulses any more, he feels that he is going down to the lower level; and he is asking every day, "What is it my duty to do?" He does not get any higher than this. It is a sign of great retrogression. It is a sign that a man has lost the liberty of a son of God. It is a sign that he is no longer a friend, but a servant. He feels like doing his duty and that is all."—*Beecher.*

"Go out with me to-day into the woods, where the white oak is, and where the beech is. Their leaves died last November, but they all hang on the trees yet. The trees have not strength enough to slough them. They always make me think of a great many people. Sap does not run in them any more, but their duties hang on them like dead leaves all over. They would not like to drop their duties; they are not quite in that state yet; but those duties are dry, sapless, and enforced"—*Ibid.*

"Ho, such a one!" The name of the kinsman who feared to mar his own inheritance is blotted out, whilst the name of him who was willing to marry the stranger and the outcast, has been transmitted to honorable remembrance. In like manner the name of the beggar has been left on perpetual record, whilst the name of the rich man at whose gate he lay has utterly perished."—*Elliot.*

"The Muse of History does not trouble herself with useless names, but lets them drop into a congenial oblivion, and if compelled to record some facts about them, uses such a slightly contemptuous epithet—"Such a one." A poor immortality that almost worse than utter neglect."—*Braden.*

"The Pyramids of Egypt, selfishly reared it is thought, to perpetuate the fame of the mighty monarchs that built them, refuse to whisper their ambitious names; but the poor widow, who, without thinking of fame, silently dropped her two mites into the temple treasury, and the weeping penitent who, in the prodigality of her great love anointed the feet of her Savour with her precious spikenard, shall, wherever the gospel is preached to the end of time, have these acts spoken of for a memorial of them. In the highest sense, every true act of goodness is immortal."—*Thomson.*

"If kinsmen dwell together, and one of them

die, and have no child, the wife of the dead shall not marry outside [i.e. outside the family circle], unto a stranger; her husband's kinsman shall go unto her, and take her to wife and perform the duty of a husband's kinsman unto her. And it shall be that the first-born whom she beareth shall stand upon the name [i.e. take the place, or arise in the place] of the kinsman who is dead, that his name be not wiped out of Israel. And if the man like not to take his kinsman's wife, then let his kinsman's wife go up to the gate, unto the elders, and say, 'my husband's kinsman refuseth to raise up unto his kinsman a name in Israel; he will not do the duty of my husband's kinsman.' Than the elders of the city shall call him, and speak unto him; and if he stand to it, and say, I like not to take her; then shall his kinsman's wife come unto him in the presence of the elders, and loose his shoe, from off his feet, and spit in his face, and shall answer and say, 'so let it be done unto the man who will not build up his kinsman's house.' And his name shall be called in Israel, House of the shoe taken off."—Deut. xxv. 5-10.

VERSE 9.

Theme.—THE KINSMAN REDEEMER.

"The man most man, with tenderest human hands
Works best for man, . . . as God in Nazareth.—*Mrs. Browning.*

Ye are witnesses this day that I have bought all that was Elimelech's, etc.

Charity should begin at home, with that which is nearest. So redemption, deliverance must work along the same lines, from the same centre. In every way the claims of the nearest are first. How far Boaz recognised the force of this law may be seen in his respect for the rights of the nearest kinsman [cf. on iii. 12, 13; iv 3, 4]. That failing only, the welcomed claim falls upon himself [cf. also Jer. xxxii. 7, 8, etc.].

The same law is recognised and followed in the world-wide schemes of redemption. God is our Father, what nearer relationship can there be than this? Christ the elder brother. *And in this link between the human and the Divine* is the reason for the incarnation at Bethlehem, the agony at Gethsemane, the sacrifice at Calvary. *He was redeeming his own.* The sin was in the flesh, and the payment must be in the flesh. Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same, etc. (cf. Heb. ii. 14—16). More emphatically still is this law of kinship asserting itself on our behalf laid down in the epistle to the Galatians. The "children" are represented as seen "in bondage under the elements of the world," Then when the "fulness of the time" had come, "God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law. To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons" (Gal. iv. 3-5). The whole belongs to the family economy, the family arrangements for bringing back and buying back its own. Hence it is the spirit of Anti-Christ to say that Christ has not come in the flesh—a blow at the very foundation truth of the gospel—a denial of the one and only hope of humanity.

Notice then with regard to the office of this Kinsman Redeemer.

I. It was not an arbitrary institution. It was one resting upon principles inherent to man, that help comes or should come from those nighest to us.

1. *It was reasonable.* Founded upon the reason of things, and working in harmony with all that essentially belongs to the idea of human society. The family estate remained unimpaired because of it for any considerable length of time, and was kept from passing to others. The Hebrews would not lose a single family, or branch of the family if they could help it—a wise and statesman-like arrangement. [cf. also ii, 20, 21; p. 140.]

So in the wider sphere. Sin has brought disorder, alienation, loss of heritage, into the midst of the great family of God. But *are there no remedial processes that spring out of the family life and bond?* To deny this possibility is to deny every

hope of humanity, and can belong to a creed born only of despair. No doubt as to the Scriptural answer to the question. They remembered that God was their Rock and the high God their Redeemer (Psalm lxxviii, 35.) Christ hath redeemed, etc. (Gal. iii. 13). Ye are bought with a price (1 Cor. vii. 23). Cf. also 1 Peter 18, 19; 1 Tim. ii. 6; Matt. xx. 28; Mark x. 45, etc., etc. And, however, we explain the utterance of Job (xix. 25) it has this great hope of humanity underlying it. I know that my goel is not cut off, but liveth ever to make intercession for me; he will not forsake me, but will stand at the latter day upon the earth, having redeemed for me my forfeited possession, etc. (*Macartney's Trans.*)

2. *It was necessitated.* That is if the family tree be kept with all its branches flourishing. There must be some way of providing for lost and forfeited inheritances. So as between God and man, the scheme of redemption springs out of the necessities of the case, and is but the outcome of the character of God Himself, and His love for His alienated children.

3. *It was legally and technically right.* An express provision of the law. Law indeed in its best sense is only the endeavour to fix these great principles of human nature and give them expression. Note. (1) *Law is not enough for the law might and must fail at times as it did here.* Either it absolved this kinsman, as Lange thinks, or it was too weak to carry out its own demands of him in the face of a popular superstition [see last outline]. (2) *Love alone can truly undertake to redeem.* (*a*) Looks through the letter into the spirit. The spirit of the law entirely on Ruth's side even if the letter were against her [see Crit. and Exeg. notes]. (*b*) Rises superior to all thought of fear. (*c*) Works promptly and willingly as here. One passage alone will show how completely the gospel scheme of *redemption* is in harmony with this, God so *loved*, etc. (John iii. 16).

4. *It was Divinely sanctioned* [cf. Deut. xxv, 5—10; Lev. xxv, 47—54].

II. It was not a mere passing custom, but one involving and foreshadowing glorious truths. Truly and in the deepest sense of the word a type—a figure of still better things to come.

See how significant the work of a goel is to those who believe in the redemption by Jesus Christ. *His first duty was to purchase those who were otherwise lost.* So with ourselves. We were "sold under sin," "led captive of the devil." But He came, gave Himself a ransom, bought us with His own blood, &c. [1 Peter i. 18, 19; Heb. ix. 12—15; Eph, i. 7, &c.]. *The second duty was to redeem the forfeited inheritance.* The creature and the creation groan and are in travail, but they are redeemed and shall be delivered [Rom. viii. 20]. Man was made heir and lord over all (Gen. i. 26—31; Ps. viii. 6). He is now only living as a discrowned monarch. But we see Jesus, the Apostle says (Heb. ii. 5—9), and in Him we have the hope of the final redemption of all things. *The third duty was to protect and take to Himself.* The concept of the Almighty as the Goel or Redeemer of Israel is a very common one in the Scriptures [Is. xlix. 7, liii. 3, liv, 8, &c.]. So with Christ and the Church [see next outline]. Note. *Christ is the Goel or Redeemer whose shoe is never drawn off* (*Wordsworth*). His work of Redemption is for eternity (*Ibid*).

IMPROVEMENT. (1) How completely love is the fulfilling of the law! (2) And even where the law fails love triumphs. (3) We have here redemption (a) proposed, (b) accomplished, (c) applied.

"And if the name of Redeemer be dear to us, conveying, as it does merely the idea of a benevolent person, who, by purchase, delivers a poor bondsman from servitude, how much dearer will it be when we find it setting forth to us the brotherhood into which the High and Lofty One, that inhabiteth eternity, enters with his best creatures, and the watchful, patients care which he exercises over them."—*Macartney.*

"Our ancestors by corrupting the spirit and blood of humanity brought upon the Son of Man his sore travail. The degeneracy of the race is His humiliation. What ever reproach He may suffer, He will be numbered with transgressors, that through his straightness he may breack their bonds, and restore the integrity of their nature. He must redeem men 'because He is the Son of Man.' . . . . The great secret of Christ's power over men lies in the fact that in Him humanity is Divine. On the ground of his supreme humanity,

nothing is more natural than that He should say 'I will draw all men unto me' . . . . His drawing power was always in principle the same, 'I drew them with cords of a man' (Hosea xi. 4,) . . . . In His descent into our earthly human condition He becomes himself the first example of his own law. *"Thou mayest not set a stranger over thee which is not thy brother.'* (Deut. xvii. 15,) Does not the Highest Authority for this law vanish if we deny the humanity of the Son of God?"—*Pulsford.*

"The kinship with the redeemed in short, is an invariable law and condition of redemption. And this law holds of the Divine Goel. 'Forasmuch as we were partakers of flesh and blood Christ also himself took part in the same.' 'None but a man could be the Goel of men. No alien, no stranger, could interpose for us; only 'the Man who is near of kin to us, our nearest kinsman.' Hence the Son of God became the Son of Man."—*Cox.*

"Will the vexed accursed humanity
As worn by Him, begin to be
A blessed, yea, a sacred thing
For love and awe and ministering?"
Mrs. Browning.

"Under this manifold and most appropriate image we have presented to us the supreme facts in the moral history of the world, the truths which have most profoundly entered into our spiritual experiences. No poor Hebrew who had been compelled to part with the fields he had inherited from his fathers suffered a loss comparable with ours, when, by sin, we had lost the righteousness, the right relation to God and man, in which we were originally placed by the Father of our spirits. No Hebrew sold, or selling himself, for a slave to a hard and alien master ever endured a bondage half so bitter and shameful as that into which we fell when, sold under sin, we sank into bondage to our lusts. No deliverance wrought by a Hebrew Goel is worthy to be compared with that by which Christ has made it possible for us to subdue our evil passions and lusts and to possess ourselves of a righteousness more stable, and more perfect."—*Cox.*

"Kinsmen." Lit. Goels. The distinction between this and other words used to designate one near of kin, is that whereas the latter denotes only relationship, this implies certain defined rights and obligations. The rights of the Goel who was the nearest living blood relation, consisted (1) in the redemption of the inheritance, and when, he had sold himself into slavery, of the person of him who was near of kin to him, (2) in his claim to restitution or satisfaction for wrong done to such an one, when he left no son behind him, and (3) in the avenging the blood of such an one in the case of murder if intentional, and even if accidental, provided the manslayer were found without the precincts of the cities of refuge."—*Elliot.*

VERSE 10.

Theme.—The Bridegroom Redeemer.

"Love he sent to bind
The disunited tendrils of that vine
Which bears the wine of life, the human heart."—*Shelley.*

"But now possession crowns endeavour,
I took her in my heart, to grow
And fill the hollow place for ever."—*Jean Ingelow.*

Moreover, Ruth the Moabitess have I purchased . . . to be my wife.

Ruth's recompense now is to be plainly and openly manifested. As with the wise men who sought they knew not what, she, too, had seen the star in the East, and followed it she knew not where. Faith had sustained her. With sublime, heroic self-denial, leaving all behind, she had said to Naomi, "Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God." She had come to find neglect and penury in Israel, to be a lonely gleaner in the hot sun, known and pointed at as the Moabitish woman who came back with Naomi. Her virtue evident, and not unknown in the gate; whatever claims she had upon kinsmen had been ignored, because she was one of an "accursed race." That which should have come to her unsought, she has not merely to demand, but to seek for and plead for (iii. 9) "Spread thy wing over thine handmaid for thou art a near kinsman." And when her noble-hearted protector had demanded public justice for her the claim had been repudiated. But the path of the just shines none the less towards the perfect day because of obstacles like these. There was one generous-spirited man in Israel at least who had marked her virtue, her self-respect, shining con-

spicuously, not only in the harvest field, but even during the difficult and delicate interview in the threshing floor. And now he shelters her under the spreading wings of his own fair name and social position, rejected as she is, takes her to himself before all. Did ever fiction conceive a more fitting climax to so sweet a story? "Marriage is honourable" everywhere and in all ages, where more so than here?

I. Marriage is honorable because of principles to be seen and illustrated here.—(1) *The relationship openly acknowledged.* A most important thing this, which, if refused, can only be refused from mean and sinister motives. Clandestine marriages a fruitful source of misery. Why should there be any reason for not acknowledging the relationship entered upon before all? Boaz was not ashamed of Ruth, although she was *a Moabitess.* Not ashamed even of the peculiar motives which prompted his conduct. Nor will any true man be. Note. *If there be cause to be ashamed of the moment's confession, why should he seek a life-long companionship?* Love may begin in secret, but ends in being confessed openly.

(2). *Publicly recognised.* "We are witnesses," they said. (*a*) Enforces fidelity, (*b*) gives legal protection, (*c*) secures permanence to the relationship, (*d*) hands down a good name to the children, and preserves them from the finger of scorn. Note. *He that tampers with the institution of marriage touches the ark of God* (*Thomson*) cf. Gen. ii. 18, 21-25. [See also on "Marriages in Moab," ch. i. 4, pp. 26-28.]

(3) *Solemnly ratified.* (*a*) With prayer. The Lord make, etc. What is religion intended for if it is not to come in at times like this? The secularisation of marriage means the separation of human life from divine things at its most solemn moments. A sorry match that has no prayer breathed over it, a disastrous beginning likely to have a worse end (*Braden*). Rather our religion should come in the more, to touch life and humanity everywhere, on all sides. Note. *The prayers here are not official prayers,* but those of the people, the elders and inhabitants of the city. (*b*) With lavish professions of good will, neighbourly expressions of esteem, desires for prosperity, etc. Ruth, indeed, taken with the approval and acclamation of the people—a truly Eastern picture. Note. *The sanction of Christianity must ever rest upon kindred scenes.* Christ's first miracle was wrought at a marriage-feast.

II. Marriage is honorable because of what it is used to illustrate and shadow forth. The inspired Word has put honour by making it to express, represent, and illustrate some of the kindred relationships between God and man. (*a*) *Between Israel and Jehovah*: "Thy Maker is thy husband" (Isa. liv. 5); (*b*) *between Christ and the Church* (Eph. v. 25; Rev. xxi. 2). Note *Relationships below are often only the faint shadow of grander relationships above.* What else can we expect when man himself was made in the image of God (Gen. i, 27). So Moses was commanded to make the tabernacle according to the pattern God showed him in the Mount.

In the union of Ruth the Moabitess with Boaz, of Bethlehem, the future birth-place of Christ, we have a foreshadowing of the mystical union and marriage between Christ and the Gentile world, and of the junction of Jew and Gentile in one body in Him (*Wordsworth*). Certainly the incident very beautifully illustrates Christ's dealings with those who were once alien and reprobate. (1) *He takes them to Himself,* just as Ruth was taken in her lowly estate and poverty a Moabitess. (2) *He covers them with His wing* [cf. on the Overshadowing Wing, page 119, etc.]. (3) *He clothes them with His righteousness.* Ventured the marring of his own inheritance to do this, for though He was rich yet for our sakes He became poor (*M. Henry*). (4) *He redeems their inheritance,* and presents them to a more lasting heritage.

IMPROVEMENT.—How strikingly the story here exemplifies the words of Christ, "Verily, I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, etc. (Mark x. 29, 30).

"All Bethlehem seemed moved to a devout and gladsome sympathy, with an event which had such a history behind it. The little town kept holiday; and it was meet that it should do so. Far from us be that ungenial and narrow spirit, which would frown upon cheerfulness at such an hour. It is one of the marks of the Divinity of our religion that it touches our humanity on all sides. But farther still be that irreligious spirit which would degrade the marriage rite into a mere business transaction, and form a connection between two human beings for better or for worse, a union of interest and affections, of hopes and fears, so that 'they twain become one flesh,' and only the grave has power to break the bond with less of deliberation and solemnity than men usually display in the sale or the purchase of an animal. Surely the formation of the marriage bond pre-eminently ought to be 'sanctified by the word of God and by prayer.'"—*Thomson.*

"Love is the best investment of all, save conscience and the sentiment of duty. These are the treasure-houses of life, the great market wherein the shares are always rising. The step can be easily taken, but never retraced. It brings with it, in all cases, additional sorrows as well as joys. The freedom of the man and woman is thereby in a certain sense limited and curtailed. Then each has to think not alone of self, but, also, and as much, if not more of another. Each has to act, not with a view to personal comfort and ease, but with the loving purpose of contributing all possible satisfaction and joy to another's life."—*Braden.*

"And may our love be ne'er a trailing robe,
To clog our feet along our heavenward way,
But a warm garment for our daily use.
Marriage is but for earth, but holy love
Will live in Heaven. Let us ever strive,
To grow more like to God—for God is love.'
—*Mrs. Browning*

VERSES 11—22.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.—Ver. 11. **We are witnesses.** The business settled without lawyers or legal casuistry (*A. Clarke*). **The Lord make.** The birth of children looked upon as a direct interference of Providence—a contribution to the fulfilment of the great promise whereon their hearts were set (*E. Price*). **Like Rachel and like Leah.** The two ancestresses of all true Israelites. Like Ruth they had left home for their husbands. The younger probably mentioned first not only as the favourite wife, but as connected with Bethlehem (Gen. xxxv. 19; Jer. xxxi. 15). **Do thou worthily [manfully].** Lit. make thou strength or power. **In Ephratah.** Some distinguished Ephratah as the country, Bethlehem as the town (*Bernard, Price*). **And be famous in Bethlehem.** Lit. call a name. Get a name (*Lange*). Meant "act the noble part" (*Morison*). The real force of the whole phrase is "Be thou influential in the growth of thy wealth, and be well spoken of as far as thy influence may be made to extend" (*E. Price*). These words are prophetic, for thence came the birth of Him who has made Bethlehem famous in all the world (*Theodoret*).

Ver. 12. **Like the house of Pharez** [Gen. xxxviii. 29; 1 Chron. ii. 4; Matt. i. 3.] The second son of Judah (Numb. xxvi. 20) and one of the ancestors of Boaz. His family was more illustrious and numerous than that of his brother Zarah. Perez also was a son of Tamar, who, although a very different character than Ruth, resembled her in history in that she suffered injustice in having the rights of marriage withheld from her [see *Lange* in loco.]

Ver. 13. **The Lord gave her.** By a special blessing Boaz advanced in years (*Wordsworth*). **A son.** The kinsman's superstitious fears [see on v. 6] now shown to be groundless.

Ver. 14. **Blessed be the Lord.** Another rythmical sentence [cf. i. 16, p. 66; also cp. Luke i. 46—55; 68—79, etc.] **Not left thee this day without a kinsman [redeemer.] Thy grandson** (*Wordsworth*). So *Lange* and *Morison*. Not so, Boaz (*Speaker's Com.*). Obed would inherit the estate of Elimelech, and so he is the real goel of Naomi. The grammatical construction also points to Obed, "the restorer, nourisher, &c.," as well as the phrase "this day." **That his name may be.** And may his name be (*Lange*).

Ver. 15. **And he shall be [may he be] a restorer....nourisher.** Trueliterally in her case, true spiritually to all the world by Him who was born at Bethlehem of this seed according to the flesh (*Theodoret*). **Better to thee than seven sons.** Cf. 1 Sam. i. 8; ii. 5, for similar expressions. The women acknowledge now how far short the legal friendship of Israel towards Naomi has fallen in comparison with the self-sacrifice of the daughter of Moab (*Lange*). The prospect now presented of her becoming the tribe mother of a numerous and flourishing family (*Keil*).

Ver. 17. **Her neighbours gave it a name.** Besides this he doubtless received a name from his parents (*Lange*). This of the women continued and inserted in the family genealogy, because seen to be appropriate (*ibid*). **Obed, servant—***i.e.*, **of the Lord** (*Wordsworth, Gesen. Targ*) Because he served to gladden Naomi's old age (*Steele and Terry*). Serving or worshipping (*Elliot*). Must be understood in the sense of serving as a son [see *Lange* in loco.] Obed in the sense of "one that serves," harmonises well with the words in v. 15 (*Bertheau.*)

Ver. 18. **Now these are the generations.** The table presents ten names. A round number, suggesting, it may be, that unimportant ones have been omitted. The scribes were accustomed to do this both to ease their own labour of transcription, and to give additional emphasis to the

names appearing in the received list (*E. Price*) [see Introduction, p. 4, 5.]. Boaz. Not Mahlon, as might have been expected from the Levirate law. David. Why end with this name if the book were written, as Bertheau, Davidson, and others seem to think, long after the time of Solomon? Points possibly to a reason, if he were reigning as king.

VERSES 11—13.

Theme.—PRAYERS FOR POSTERITY AND PROSPERITY.

Patience and abnegation of self, and devotion to others,
This was the lesson a life of trial and sorrow had taught her.
So was her love diffused, but, like to some odorous spices,
Suffered no waste nor loss, though filling the air with aroma.—*Longfellow.*

The Lord make the woman, etc. And let thy house, etc. So Boaz took Ruth, etc.

Good wishes are to be regarded as prayers before God, but those of a people ("all the people") as the effectual fervent prayer which availeth much (*E. Price*). Good to keep the heart in readiness, so as to resolve our common emotions of sympathy into benedictions as here. How long did this blessing rest over the house of Boaz?—until Christ came? The best seal to a compact like this found in prayers like these which stretch out towards generations yet unborn.

I. We have the general truth taught here. That the love of posterity may be used of God and sanctified. How the Hebrew idea of "children, a blessing from the Lord" expresses itself in these devout prayers. Note. *All natural emotions and tendencies may be worked by the Divine wisdom into the great scheme of Providence and grace* (*E. Price*). The Incarnation, the direct issue and product of preceding conditions. God glorifying what is good in the race, the noble spirit of Boaz, the virtue of Ruth, the prayers of these devout Israelites, all leading upwards, onwards, toward the Christ that is to be. (1) How wonderful! (2) How suggestive! Who knows what His purposes may be through our children, if we are faithfully consecrating them to Him? Men make much of a pious ancestry. What if we look in the other direction, and have faith, and use the privilege of prayer aright?

II. The particular truth is taught here: That a Moabitess is thus introduced among the progenitors of our Lord Himself. Cf. Matt. i. 5. Boaz begat Obed of Ruth. A memorable fact. A Gentile woman thus rendered a constituent portion of the Redeemer's genealogy (*E. Price*). Why? (1) *To indicate the heathen were not quite forgotten under the old dispensation* severe and exclusive as it was (*Ibid*). (2) To emphasise the fact that *God has always appeared to work by what at some times might be regarded as contraries.* (3) *To remove the suspicion* from the sceptic *that the Advent depended upon the mere natural course of events* (*Ibid*). (4) To keep the devout student lovingly and reverently *dependent upon the unerring though mysterious will of the Most High* (*Ibid*).

Theme.—CHILDREN THE GIFT OF HEAVEN.

E. Price on *The seed which the Lord shall give thee.*

The Jewish idea may be modified by us, that the number of children measures a man's felicity. Yet the truth, underlying it, continues with us: viz., that pious descendants are always the greatest blessings which the great Father can bestow upon us.

Do they not bind us to heaven by sanctified affections?

Do they not sweeten home sympathies?

Do they not exemplify the advantages of that saintly education, they are supposed to be susceptible of?

Do they not become the best support of the declining years of a happy parent?

Do they not assure prosperity to a spiritual church? And *do* they not thus hand down the tradition of the faith unimpaired?

In this sense, then, "blessed is the man who has his quiver full of them."

"The man has acted both unselfishly and honourably in upholding the family custom of Israel. The public therefore, praise him and wish him good. Such applause is both desirable and profitable. The actions of a good man are fit subjects for praise. It stimulates us to higher deeds when we recognise nobleness in others. It encourages them in acts of generosity and honour. If any around us do wise, thoughtful, open-hearted, unselfish deeds, let us not fear to praise them."—*Braden.*

"What fame would be acquired in Israel by the kindness of Boaz to Ruth and Naomi? Was it to be hoped that his goodness and bounties to them would be known and praised among all the tribes? It is natural for men to think that the actions which they admire, should be known and admired by all. The hopes of these good women were, perhaps, more sanguine than the case could justify; and yet they were more than realised. The name of Boaz became famous through all Israel, and will continue famous among the Gentiles also, while the world lasts, because it is mentioned with honour in the Book of God. Both bad and good actions are often published to a greater extent, and continue longer to be known, than the doers or any of their friends expected."—*Lawson.*

"The godly are members one of another, therefore must needs have a fellow-feeling . . . . but let this be with them in lawful things, for charity rejoiceth not in iniquity. What joy can it be to a godly man to see his friend rich and in glory by usury, bribery, oppression, deceit and fraud?"—*Bernard.*

"It is one of the grand aims of divine revelation to produce this state of mind [the habitual recognition of God]; and in the case of this people it evidently had produced it. Religion was an all-pervading life. . . . It penetrated everywhere, like the sunlight. God was beheld as the Cause of causes; His Hand was visible in every occurrence; He was a felt Presence."—*Dr. A. Thompson.*

VERSE 11.

Theme.—MANLINESS, ITS FIT AND PROPER SPHERE.

"The world waits
For help. Beloved, let us love so well,
Our work shall still be better for our love,
And still our love be sweeter for our work."—*Mrs. Browning.*

Do thou worthily [*manfully*] *in Ephratah and be famous* [*get a name*] *in Bethlehem.*

The world wants men, always has done so; did so even thus early in its history—men who play the worthy, manful part. Such will always (1) be well spoken of, (2) desired and longed for, (3) in the highest sense "make the best of both worlds." Note. (1) *Honour, the respect and esteem of others,* not to be despised as cynics would teach, rather to be sought for in legitimate ways as in the sight of God. [cf. Ps. i., cxii., Job xxix., Prov. iv. 8, 9, etc.] (2) *To be truly a man and play the manly part includes all virtues,* or should do so. (*a*) *So on the gentler side.* To be human is to be humane, and should be thus understood always. Note. Impossible to be noble in character without tenderness, gentleness, compassionateness, etc. (*b*) *So on the sterner side.* The root idea of the word virtue is strength. The strong man, self-contained, self-balanced, having the mastery over his passion, is the virtuous man. This seemingly the idea of the text, "Act the part of a true man, a strong man." A right worthy exhortation for such an occasion.

I. The sphere of this manly part. *At home*—in Ephratah, Bethlehem. Do good among thy own people [Ezk. xviii. 18], be public-spirited, though to private disadvantage (*Trapp*). So in Christ's charge to His disciples, these home claims and duties are not forgotten. "Beginning at Jerusalem," He said. Note. *Easy to ignore this aspect of duty*—like Jonah, to flee to Tarshish from the Nineveh God has pointed out, but this is the Divine idea, "Begin at home." "Shine there,"

consecrate that. "Return to thine own house and shew how great things God hath done unto thee" (Luke viii. 39). Note. *A difficult duty this always*, as with Eli, Noah, Lot, Judah [cf. Genesis xxxviii; Song of Sol. i, 6].

II The results of this manly part. *Be famous*, etc. The two things linked together, the doing worthily and the fame that follows it. Note. *All other ways of making a reputation valueless.* Great reputations are to be obtained by great merits, by saying well and doing well, by wise speech and wise actions, by being useful and serviceable in our own day and generation. Note. (*a*) *A great name often not so much to be coveted, "but a good name is better than precious ointment" (Lawson).* (*b*) The common and vulgar ideas of fame, glory, martial renown, etc., not encouraged here. It is *fame won at home* of which the text speaks.

"Home is the most appropriate sphere for Christian usefulness. It is the place where true piety is ever tested, and false piety soonest put to the blush. It has the first claims upon the man of God, whatever his public position may be. And yet how often is this forgotten or ignored. Eli, priest of the Living God, can enter into the Holiest place and stand before the Shekinah glory in the manifested presence of Deity itself, and yet he cannot order his household aright, or protect the sanctuary of the Most High from the pollution of his children. But it is not so with the truly devout and consecrated spirit. As master, or as servant, in the workshop and in the counting house, it is there his Christ-like character shines to best advantage; it is there, by the quiet influence which belongs to every life, the noblest testimony is borne for God. The household is hallowed, the home life consecrated, the private walks sanctified, the neighbourhood blessed by the sweet and gentle aroma of a holy and heavenly life."—*B*

"A name truly good is the aroma from a virtuous character. It is a spontaneous emanation from genuine excellence. It is a reputation for whatsoever things are honest and lovely, and of good report. It is such a name as is not only remembered on earth but written in heaven. Just as a box of spikenard is not only valuable to its possessor, but pre-eminently precious in its diffusion; so, when a name is really good, it is of unspeakable service to all who are capable of feeling its aspiration."—*Hamilton.*

"But there are deeds which should not pass away,
And names that must not wither, though the earth
Forgets her empire with a just decay.
The enslavers and the enslaved, their death and birth,
The high, the mountain majesty of worth
Should be, and shall, survivors of its woe,
And from its immortality look forth
In the sun's face, like yonder Alpine snow,
Imperishably pure beyond all things below."
—*Byron.*

VERSES 14, 15.

Theme.—CONGRATULATIONS AND GOOD WISHES.

The soul of music slumbers in the shell,
Till waked and kindled by the master's spell;
And feeling hearts, touch them but rightly, pour
A thousand melodies unheard before.—*Rogers.*

Blessed be the Lord which hath not left thee this day without a kinsman.

The birth of a son and heir an important event always; more especially in an eastern household, and with one of the age and position of Boaz. A memorable day this, too, in the history of Israel. Another link added in the chain Christward. The joy here an earnest of the joy hereafter, the barriers of national pride broken down in part; prophetic of that glory to God in the highest, peace on earth, goodwill towards men (Luke ii. 14). Note. *First prayer here* (*v.* 11) *now praise.* Blessed, etc.

In these congratulations there is **I. A glance at the new circumstances surrounding Naomi.** As much our duty to rejoice with those who rejoice as to weep with those who weep. (*a*) We should enter into their plans (*b*), sympathise in their successes (*c*), rejoice especially at their unexpected prosperity, as here. Note (1) *We cannot help doing this if we encourage that which is good in ourselves.* God

made men to sympathise with each other, only that sin has made them selfish and envious.

(2) *Man's duty is to respond to these Divinely implanted instincts.* Our good wishes are not worth much unless they find utterance or expression in some way. Here the joy not only felt but avowed. "The women are, as is usual in such times, full of expressive sympathy. That is quite a touch of nature."—*(Braden.)*

There is **II.** A glance heavenward. The Lord, etc. The joy of the godly has this holy and religious expression naturally and always. Especially should we look upward in these moments of family rejoicing. Note. *Whatever joy men may give us, praise is due to God, who thus makes them the instruments of his benefits.*

Right again that this devout feeling should find expression. Is it that our homes are to be made glad with his gifts, and our hearts with the sunshine of his presence, and no sign be seen of the gladness which is there? A holy and profitable way of gossiping this; God praised and called upon (*Trapp*). Note. *The blessings of the Old Testament generally of a material character* (*Kitto*). Yet they are not the less often the source of spiritual joy (cf. Isa. xxiii).

III. A glance toward the future. He shall be unto thee, etc. (v. 15) Why to Naomi especially? Are we not to see in this her reward for all the past? Note. (*a*) *Those are to be comforted most by us who have been most humbled.* They need it most, and we should be ready to speak the word of consolation. A poor Christian who has no word of congratulation for a time like this! (*b*) *A joyous prospect may open suddenly even for the sorrowing and the aged.* Call me not Naomi, she had said (I. 20). But God can send light at eventide. [See next outline].

E. Price on this: *Theme* —A GOOD CHILD.

Women do not always babble vain things. How quick are they to apprehend the modifications of our domestic life.

Study, then, the portrait of a good son, which they offer here.

God must have given him.

God adapts him to special needs.

God makes him felt as a comforter (Heb., a Redeemer).

God in him restores exhausted life.

God secures the true honour of the family.

And God thus "nourishes" old age, till it be resolved into heaven. Yes! God *is* in all!

Let parents pray, labour, and educate for this high end.

Let children see to it that their welcomed presence around the hearth may secure it.

And let "our gossips" even change their idle talk into kind congratulations and earnest prayers.

"It would seem as if there was already a kind of joyous foretaste of the birth and infancy which, in after times, was to be for ever associated with the name of Bethlehem. It was the first appearance on the scene of what may by anticipation be called, even then, the Holy Family, for that child was Obed, the father of Jesse, the father of David. Nor is it a mere genealogical connexion between the two generations. The very licence and independence of the age may be said to have been the means of introducing into the ancestry of David and of the Messiah an element which else would have been, humanly speaking, impossible. 'An Ammonite or a Moabite shall not enter into the congregation' (Deut. xxiii. 3; Ezra ix. 1; Neh. xiii. 1). This was the letter of the law, and, in the greater strictness that prevailed after the return from the captivity, it was rigidly enforced. But in the isolation of Judah from the rest of Israel, in the doing of every man what was right in his own eyes, the more comprehensive spirit of the whole religion overstepped the letter of a particular enactment."—*Stanley.*

VERSES 15, 16.

Theme.—YOUTH AND AGE.

"O thou bright thing fresh from the hand of God.
* * * * * *
Nearer I seem to God when looking on thee;
'Tis ages since He made His youngest star;
His hand was on thee as 'twere yesterday."—*Alexander Smith.*

He shall be to thee a restorer of thy life, etc. *And Naomi took the child, etc.*

How often the children are messengers of God, bringing new life into the household as here. There is a fountain of love enclosed in the heart of the aged, and it only needs the tiny infant fingers of some dear one's child to unloose it. Note. *The birth of a new spirit may come in the home with the new life.* New consecration to God, new sympathy with all around. "Children are a heritage from the Lord." (*a*) What sacredness should surround them, (*b*) what prayers ascend for them, (*c*) what blessedness be found in them! Note. *If a man do not find his joy in the home, he will find his burden there.*

Dwell on, **I.** What the children expect from us. (*a*) Care, (*b*) attention, (*c*) protection, (*d*) love, (*e*) nurture and training. In the text Naomi seen as responding to these demands. Her name still descriptive of her character [cf. on I. 2, p. 14]. Must be doing something. Felt that she had a duty which was no burden but a pleasure. "Took the child," etc. Note. (*a*) *Whoever was once capable of true love preserves its power for ever after* (*Lange*). And life all the way through finds a sphere for it. Even in old age, when the maternal instinct may have been thought to have almost died out, Naomi becomes a foster-mother. So generally. Grandchildren not loved less, but sometimes more than the children themselves. Note. (*b*) *Love may grow more intense, even as the shadows of death begin to fall around.* What a tribute to and foreshadowing of its immortality.

II. What we expect of the children. (1) *They are to be the restorers of life and joy.* "He shall be," etc. Life intended to have this twofold, and reciprocal action and aspect. We do not give more than we get, if the true conception of God's word and of our nature be carried out. Love brings its own reward. (2) *They are to be the supports of old age.* "And a nourisher," etc. The conditions will be reversed by-and-bye. Weakness coming on with us as strength grows with them. Then this new law is to come into operation. They are to succour and cherish in return for the past, as the trembling infirmities of second childhood claim us as their own. Beautiful, divine idea, which sin and selfishness may mar, but cannot altogether destroy! The old and the feeble never forgotten, but reaping then what they have sowed in the tears and joys, the sorrows and cares, and fond affections lavished upon childhood and infancy.

IMPROVEMENT.—So the Church is to foster young converts. In return they will become sooner or later her strength and support. Note. *Spiritual children bring a greater blessing to her than "seven sons" according to the flesh* (*Lange*).

Children should nourish their old parents and supply their wants, *ἀντι πελαργων*. Storks and mice feed their dams when old; boughs incline and bend down towards the root; and in summer, receiving from the root leaves, flowers, and fruit, they let them fall again in winter to the fattening and nourishing of the root. Unkind and unnatural children are like kites, which, when grown strong expel their dams, and with their bills and wings beat them out of the nest."—*Trapp.*

"A certain Duke of Ormond who lost a virtuous son, the Lord Ossory, said that he would rather be the father of the dead Ossory, than of any living nobleman in England."—*Lawson.*

"It is one of the many fine points of the story, that its concluding sentences are almost wholly devoted, not to the young and happy wife and mother, but to Naomi, who had suffered so many calamities, and who, by the piety and resignation with which she bore

them, had drawn Ruth from the frivolities of Moab. It is Naomi not Ruth, whom, "the women, her neighbours," congratulate on the birth of Ruth's son. In him they see Naomi's goel—Ruth already had hers in Boaz; and they pray that, as he grows up, he may restore her to her former happiness, and be the stay and gladness of her old age. But though they speak to Naomi, and pray for her, they do not utterly forget the singular virtue of Ruth. In the words, "Thy daughter-in-law, who loveth thee, who is better to thee than seven sons," they pronounce on her an eulogy such as few "strange" women could have heard from Hebrew lips. It is because the boy is Ruth's son, that he is Naomi's goel; for how can he fail to love and cherish the woman whom his mother has loved with a love even passing the love of women."—*Cox.*

"Naomi is everywhere an image of the Church of Christ, which wins, confesses, and fosters through love. Men whose natural hearts are hostile to her, become her obedient children. When there is apostacy and misery in the Church it is for priests and preachers to repent, as Naomi did, and not to excuse themselves. . . . . And how greatly she sins, when she does not rightly foster, those who do come; exhibiting neither love, nor wisdom, nor faith in her treatment of them.—that too will one day be made manifest. Impatience is not in love; and a little money does not make amends for the coldness of consummate self-righteousness."—*Lange.*

"Of Boaz himself no warrior deeds are known, and yet the greatest of Israel's heroes, the conqueror of Goliath [There is a tradition that Goliath descended from Orpah, as David from Ruth] sprang from him. He conquered himself, and on that account became the ancestor of Him who triumphed over sin and death. Similarly, Ruth had nothing but a heart full of love, and yet to her, once a daughter of Moab, there was given what neither Deborah nor Jael obtained, to become the Mother of Him by whom all the nations are redeemed."—*Ibid.*

Verses 19—22.

Theme.—Links in the Chain Christward.

"How vain are all hereditary honours,
Those poor possessions from another's deeds,
Unless our own just virtues form our title,
And give a sanction to our fond assumption."—*Shirley.*

And they called his name Obed, etc. Now these are the generations, etc.

Not a dry list of names merely useless and cumbersome as the stones of the desert. These men lived, thought, played their part in life as we do now. Think of it. Then again the names themselves, not given haphazard, but from reasons, and with a motive. Obed, for instance, means a servant, and doubtless he was called so because of the part he was to play towards Naomi and towards God.

Suggests **I. The interest men take generally in genealogy.** (1) *Natural.* Few men insensible or careless with regard to their ancestry, especially if it has been one which has played a noble and dignified part. (2) *Allowed and encouraged by Scripture.* The lineage of Israel for many reasons of especial and world-wide importance. (3) *May be useful as a stimulus and inspiration.*

II. The interest men take in this particular record. (1) *Because of the men themselves.* They were men of fame. Nahshon a prince in Israel; David the king, etc. (2) *Because they are links in the genealogy of Christ.* It is interesting to notice the variety of rank and condition in the ancestry of the Saviour. Rahab the harlot. Ruth the gleaner. Boaz, possibly the judge. David the king. "He who was bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh," touches our race at every point, and claims kindred with it all. (*A. Thomson*). Note. *How this illustrates the spiritual relationship to which Christ invites us.* (3) *Because they are helps in the study, and attestation of prophecy and of character.* How much history is condensed in such a list! Expand it, and what lessons are to be enforced! Here, for instance, Obed is called the son of Boaz after all, and not the son of Mahlon as might have been expected. Note. *Laws and customs are often borne down by the force of circumstances and of public opinion.* Is not this the reward of Boaz—the reward of faith [cf. on IV. 6]. His name stands

here contrary to the usual custom, stands as it ought to do among the ancestors of Christ himself. [See also Introduction pp. 4, 5; and on I. 2, pp. 14, 15.]

E. Price on this: *Theme.*—HERALDRY.

What a vanity these genealogies really are, although called a science, forsooth! "The pride of life" is never more exemplified than when a bad man is seen poring over the long catalogue of, it may be, worthless predecessors. A relief, then, to study one, drawn out by God Himself, and suggesting the fondest hopes of men!

From Pharez to David—what does the genealogical "tree" really suggest to us?

Why! 1. *Our descent is only valuable as it stands related to God's purpose* in Christ Jesus. What would be the real worth of David's name, if taken away from that of his great successor?

2. *That Providence marvellously works up our little lives into the grand whole of His "Counsel."* Some of these names may in themselves be worthless, yet can they not break away from God's overruling purpose!

And 3. Regarding the descent of David and of Christ the Lord as historical facts, the scheme of the Jewish "Herald" *continually reminds us of our relation to, and gratitude for, the great and glorious Redeemer of men*—Himself the son of Adam!

Names go for something, when multiplied into that of Him, who is the Alpha and the Omega of all human events!

"Obed a servant. It may be a remembrancer of duty. Just as the motto of the Prince of Wales is 'Ich Dien,' I serve. Any way it is beautiful never to despise service. 'A Christian is to be meet for the Master's use.' How many there are who are of no use in the world! Some dislike all service, and prefer the dainty hand that is never soiled, and the life that is never separated from selfishness."—*Statham.*

"Orpah, the child of sense, dismayed by the difficulties presented, goes back again; Ruth, the child of the Spirit, 'persuaded' of better things, presses through all obstacles onward to join the Israel of God, and to find rest at last where rest at first had seemed impossible. So the 'anonymous kinsman,' fearing lest his name should be blotted out from Israel, his inheritance marred, his children called after another, misses the one opportunity of life and goes down to a nameless oblivion. Boaz, the man of nobler spirit, and larger faith, and keener insight, is deterred by no fear, held back by no difficulty; and, contrary to custom, we find his name here as the father of Obed, in the genealogy of David and of Christ. Is it hard to read the moral of such a story? the moral which works itself out everywhere in the pages of Inspiration, and repeats itself today in the history of a thousand lives; that sense deceives and sight fails, and cunning defeats itself; that the law is fallible and the letter kills, while faith endures and love conquers: and that only in obeying those instincts which are of God, and which spring up in hearts open to His influence, is the safety and solution of human life. This is the victory of faith, which overcomes the world and finds its name written at last in the Lamb's Book of Life for evermore."—*B.*

"O, Moab! out of thee shall come forth the unspotted Lamb which bears the sins of the world, and rules over the whole earth! From the rock of the wilderness, i.e., from Ruth, widowed by the death of her husband, Boaz derived Obed . . . . and from David came Christ."—*Jerome.*

"Much of Scripture, and still more of that which is written about Scripture, is but like the valley of dry bones to eyes of sense and sin. But if the Spirit, without whom there is no true understanding breathe upon it, whatever men say, it may live again, and that to the praise and glory of God."—*B.*

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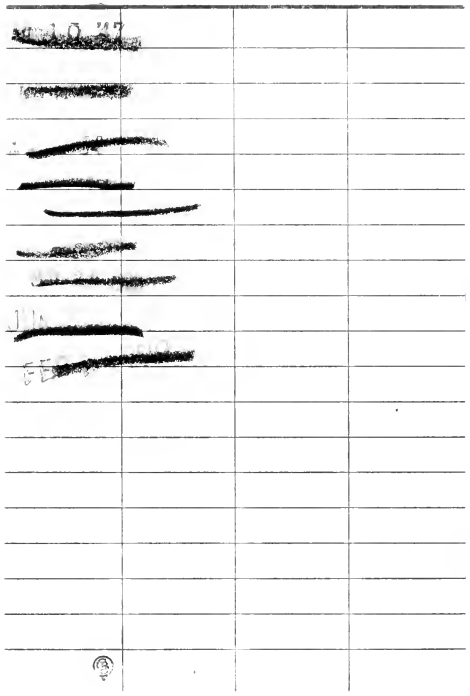

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